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MAY-JUNE, 1951

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Erich Auerbach

IN THE HOTEL DE LA MOLE

Julien Sorel, the hero of Stendhal's novel *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830), an ambitious and passionate young man, son of an uneducated small businessman from the Franche-Comté, is conducted by a series of circumstances from the seminary at Besançon, where he has been studying theology, to Paris and the position of secretary to a gentleman of rank, the Marquis de la Mole, whose confidence he gains. Mathilde, the Marquis's daughter, is a girl of nineteen, witty, spoiled, imaginative, and so arrogant that her own position and circle begin to bore her. The dawning of her passion for her father's "*domestique*" is one of Stendhal's masterpieces and has been greatly admired. One of the preparatory scenes, in which her interest in Julien begins to awaken, is the following, from Volume II, chapter 14:

Un matin que l'abbé travaillait avec Julien, dans la bibliothèque du marquis, à l'éternel procès de Frilair:

—Monsieur, dit Julien tout à coup, dîner tous les jours avec madame la marquise, est-ce un de mes devoirs, ou est-ce une bonté que l'on a pour moi?

—C'est un honneur insigne! reprit l'abbé, scandalisé. Jamais M. N. . . l'académicien, qui, depuis quinze ans, fait une cour assidue, n'a pu l'obtenir pour son neveu M. Tanbeau.

—C'est pour moi, monsieur, la partie la plus pénible de mon emploi. Je m'ennuyais moins au séminaire. Je vois bâiller quelquefois jusqu'à mademoiselle de La Mole, qui pourtant doit être accoutumée à l'amabilité des amis de la maison. J'ai peur de m'endormir. De grâce, obtenez-moi la permission d'aller dîner à quarante sous dans quelque auberge obscure.

L'abbé, véritable parvenu, était fort sensible à l'honneur de dîner avec un grand seigneur. Pendant qu'il s'efforçait de faire comprendre

ce sentiment par Julien, un léger bruit leur fit tourner la tête. Julien vit mademoiselle de La Mole qui écoutait. Il rougit. Elle était venue chercher un livre et avait tout entendu; elle prit quelque considération pour Julien. Celui-la n'est pas né à genoux, pensa-t-elle, comme ce vieil abbé. Dieu! qu'il est laid.

A dîner, Julien n'osait pas regarder mademoiselle de La Mole, mais elle eut la bonté de lui adresser la parole. Ce jour-la, on attendait beaucoup de monde, elle l'engagea à rester. . . .

The scene, as I said, is designed to prepare for a passionate and extremely tragic love intrigue. Its function and its psychological value we shall not here discuss; they lie outside of our subject. What interests us in the scene is this: it would be almost incomprehensible without a most accurate and detailed knowledge of the political situation, the social stratification, and the economic circumstances of a perfectly definite historical moment, namely, that in which France found itself just before the July Revolution. Even the boredom which reigns in the dining-room and salon of this noble house is no ordinary boredom. It does not arise from the fortuitous personal dullness of the people who are brought together there; among them there are highly educated, witty, and sometimes important people, and the master of the house is intelligent and amiable. Rather, we are confronted, in their boredom, by a phenomenon politically and ideologically characteristic of the Restoration period. In the seventeenth century, and even more in the eighteenth, the corresponding salons were anything but boring. But the inadequately implemented attempt which the Bourbon regime made to restore conditions long since made obsolete by events, creates, among its adherents in the official and ruling classes, an atmosphere of pure convention, of limitation, of constraint, against which the intelligence and good will of the persons involved are powerless. In these salons the things which interest everyone—the political and religious problems of the present, and consequently most of the subjects of its literature or of that of the very recent past—could not be discussed, or at best could be discussed only in official phrases so mendacious that a man of taste and tact would rather avoid them. How different from the intellectual daring of the famous eighteenth-century salons, which, to be sure, did not dream of the dangers to their own existence which they were unleashing! Now the danger is known, and life is

governed by the fear that the catastrophe of 1793 might be repeated. As these people are conscious that they no longer themselves believe in the thing they represent, they choose to talk of nothing but the weather, music, and court gossip. In addition, they are obliged to accept as allies snobbish and corrupt people from among the newly-rich bourgeoisie, who, with the unashamed baseness of their ambition and with their fear for their ill-gotten wealth, completely vitiate the atmosphere of society. So much for the pervading boredom.

But Julien's reaction, too, and the very fact that he and the former director of his seminary, the Abbé Pirard, are present at all in the house of the Marquis de la Mole, are only to be understood in terms of the actual historical moment. Julien's passionate and imaginative nature has from his earliest youth been filled with enthusiasm for the great ideas of the Revolution and of Rousseau, for the great events of the Napoleonic period; from his earliest youth he has felt nothing but loathing and scorn for the piddling hypocrisy and the petty lying corruption of the classes in power since Napoleon's fall. He is too imaginative, too ambitious, and too fond of power, to be satisfied with a mediocre life within the bourgeoisie, such as his friend Fouquet proposes to him. Having observed that a man of petty-bourgeois origin can attain to a situation of command only through the nearly all-powerful Church, he had consciously and deliberately become a hypocrite; and his great talents would have assured him a brilliant intellectual career, had not his real personal and political feelings, the direct passionateness of his nature, been prone to burst forth at decisive moments. One such moment of self-betrayal we have in the passage before us, when Julien confides his feelings in the Marquis's salon to the Abbé Pirard, his former teacher and protector; for the intellectual freedom to which it testifies is unthinkable without an admixture of intellectual arrogance and a sense of inner superiority hardly becoming in a young ecclesiastic and protégé of the house. (In this particular instance his frankness does him no harm; the Abbé Pirard is his friend, and upon Mathilde, who happens to overhear him, his words make an entirely different impression from that which he should expect and fear.) The Abbé is here described as a true parvenu, who knows how highly the honor of sitting at a great man's table should be esteemed and hence disapproves of Julien's remarks; as another motive for the Abbé's dis-

approval Stendhal could have cited the fact that uncritical submission to the evil of this world, in full consciousness that it is evil, is a typical attitude for strict Jansenists; and the Abbé Pirard is a Jansenist. We know from the previous part of the novel that as director of the seminary at Besançon he had had to endure much persecution and much chicanery on account of his Jansenism and his strict piety, which no intrigues could touch; for the clergy of the province were under the influence of the Jesuits. When the Marquis de la Mole's most powerful opponent, the Abbé de Frilair, vicar-general to the bishop, had brought suit against him, the Marquis had made the Abbé de Pirard his confidant and had thus learned to value his intelligence and uprightness; so that finally, to free him from his untenable position at Besançon, the Marquis had procured him a benefice in Paris and somewhat later had taken the Abbé's favorite pupil, Julien Sorel, into his household as private secretary.

The characters, attitudes, and relationships of the dramatis personae, then, are very closely connected with contemporary historical circumstances; contemporary political and social conditions are woven into the action in a manner more detailed and more real than had been exhibited in any earlier novel, and indeed in any works of literary art except those expressly purporting to be politico-satirical tracts. So logically and systematically to situate the tragically conceived life of a man of low social position (as here that of Julien Sorel) within the most concrete kind of contemporary history and to develop it therefrom—this is an entirely new and highly significant phenomenon. The other circles in which Julien Sorel moves—his father's family, the house of the mayor of Verrières, M. de Rênal, the seminary at Besançon—are sociologically defined in conformity with the historical moment with the same penetration as is the house of La Mole; and not one of the minor characters—the old priest Chélan, for example, or the director of the *dépôt de mendicité*, Valenod—would be conceivable outside the particular historical situation of the Restoration period, in the manner in which they are set before us. The same laying of a contemporary foundation for events is to be found in Stendhal's other novels—still incomplete and too narrowly circumscribed in *Armance*, but fully developed in the later works: in the *Chartreuse de Parme* (which, however, since its setting is a place not yet greatly affected by modern development, some-

times gives the effect of being a historical novel), as also in *Lucien Leuwen*, a novel of the Louis-Philippe period, which Stendhal left unfinished. In the latter, indeed, in the form in which it has come down to us, the element of current history and politics is too heavily emphasized: it is not always wholly integrated into the course of the action and is set forth in far too great detail in proportion to the principal theme; but perhaps in a final revision Stendhal would have achieved an organic articulation of the whole. Finally, his autobiographical works, despite the capricious and erratic "egotism" of their style and manner, are likewise far more closely, essentially, and concretely connected with the politics, sociology, and economics of the period than are, for example, the corresponding works of Rousseau or Goethe; one feels that the great events of contemporary history affected Stendhal much more directly than they did the other two; Rousseau did not live to see them, and Goethe had managed to keep aloof from them.

To have stated this is also to have stated the circumstance which gave rise to modern tragic realism based on the contemporary world at that particular moment and in a man of that particular period: this circumstance was the first of the great movements of modern times in which large masses of men consciously took part—the French Revolution with all the consequent convulsions which spread from it over Europe. From the Reformation movement, which was no less powerful and which aroused the masses no less, it is distinguished by the much faster tempo of its spread, its mass effects, and the changes which it produced in practical daily life within a comparatively extensive territory; for the progress then achieved in transportation and communication, together with the spread of elementary education resulting from the trends of the Revolution itself, made it possible to mobilize the people far more rapidly and in a far more unified direction; everyone was reached by the same ideas and experiences more quickly, more consciously, and far more uniformly. For Europe there began that process of temporal concentration, both of historical events themselves and of everyone's knowledge of them, which has since made tremendous progress and which not only permits us to prophesy a unification of human life throughout the world but has in a certain sense achieved it already. Such a development abrogates or renders powerless the entire social

structure of orders and categories previously held valid; the tempo of the changes demands a perpetual and extremely difficult effort toward inner adaptation and produces intense concomitant crises. He who would account to himself for his real life and his place in human society is obliged to do so upon a far wider practical foundation and in a far larger context than before, and to be continually conscious that the social base upon which he lives is not constant for a moment but is perpetually changing through convulsions of the most various kinds.

We may ask ourselves how it came about that modern consciousness of reality began to find literary form for the first time precisely in Henri Beyle of Grenoble. Beyle-Stendhal was a man of keen intelligence, quick and alive, mentally independent and courageous, but not quite a great figure. His ideas are often forceful and inspired, but they are erratic, arbitrarily advanced and lacking, despite all their show of boldness, in inward certainty and continuity. There is something unsettled about his whole nature: his fluctuation between realistic candor in general and silly mystification in particulars, between cold self-control, rapturous abandonment to sensual pleasures, and insecure and sometimes sentimental vaingloriousness, is not always easy to put up with; his literary style is very impressive and unmistakably original, but it is short-winded, not uniformly successful, and only seldom wholly takes possession of and fixes the subject. But, such as he was, he offered himself to the moment; circumstances seized him, tossed him about, and laid upon him a unique and unexpected destiny; they formed him so that he was compelled to come to terms with reality in a way which no one had done before him.

When the Revolution broke out Stendhal was a boy of six; when he left his native city of Grenoble and his reactionary, old-bourgeois family, who though glumly sulking at the new situation were still very wealthy, and went to Paris, he was sixteen. He arrived there immediately after Napoleon's *coup d'état*; one of his relatives, Pierre Daru, was an influential adherent of the First Consul; after some hesitations and interruptions, Stendhal made a brilliant career in the Napoleonic administration. He saw Europe on Napoleon's expeditions; he grew to be a man, and indeed an extremely elegant man of the world; he also became, it appears, a useful administrative

official and a cold-blooded organizer who did not lose his calm even in danger. When Napoleon's fall threw him out of the saddle, he was in his thirty-second year. The first, active, successful, and brilliant part of his career was over. Thenceforth he has no profession and no place claims him. He can go where he pleases, so long as he has money enough and so long as the suspicious officials of the post-Napoleonic period have no objection to his sojourns. But his financial circumstances gradually become worse; in 1821 he is exiled from Milan, where he had settled, by Metternich's police; he goes to Paris, and there he lives for another nine years, without a profession, alone, and with very slender means. After the July Revolution his friends get him a post in the diplomatic service; since the Austrians refuse him an *exequatur* for Trieste, he has to go as consul to the little port of Civit  Vecchia; it is a dreary place to live, and there are those who try to get him into trouble if he prolongs his visits to Rome unduly; to be sure, he is allowed to spend a few years in Paris on leave—so long, that is, as one of his protectors is Minister of Foreign Affairs. Finally he falls seriously ill in Civit  Vecchia and is given another leave in Paris; he dies there in 1842, smitten by apoplexy in the street, not yet sixty. This is the second half of his life; during this period, he acquires the reputation of being a witty, eccentric, politically and morally unreliable man; during this period, he begins to write. He writes first on music, on Italy and Italian art, on love; it is not until he is forty-three and is in Paris during the first flowering of the Romantic movement (to which he contributed in his way) that he publishes his first novel.

From this sketch of his life it should appear that he first reached the point of accounting for himself, and the point of realistic writing, when he was seeking a haven in his "storm-tossed boat," and discovered that, for his boat, there was no fit and safe haven; when, though in no sense weary or discouraged, yet already a man of forty, whose early and successful career lay far behind him, alone and comparatively poor, he became aware, with all the sting of that knowledge, that he belonged nowhere. For the first time, the world around him became a problem; his feeling that he was different from other men, until now borne easily and proudly, doubtless now first became the predominant concern of his consciousness and hence the recurring theme of his literary activity. Stendhal's

realistic writing grew out of his discomfort in the post-Napoleonic world and his consciousness that he did not belong to it and had no place in it. Discomfort in the given world and inability to become part of it is, to be sure, characteristic of Rousseauian Romanticism and it is probable that Stendhal had something of that even in his youth; there is something of it in his congenital disposition, and the course of his youth can only have strengthened such tendencies, which, so to speak, harmonized with the tenor of life of his generation; on the other hand, he did not write his recollections of his youth, the *Vie de Henri Brulard*, until he was in his thirties, and we must allow for the possibility that, from the viewpoint of his later development, from the viewpoint of 1832, he overstressed such motifs of individualistic isolation. It is, in any case, certain that the motifs and expressions of his isolation and his problematic relation to society are wholly different from the corresponding phenomena in Rousseau and his early Romantic disciples. Stendhal, in contrast to Rousseau, had a bent for practical affairs and the requisite ability; he aspired to sensual enjoyment of life as given; he did not withdraw from practical reality from the outset, did not entirely condemn it from the outset—instead he attempted, and successfully at first, to master it. Material success and material enjoyments were desirable to him; he admires energy and the ability to master life, and even his cherished dreams (“*le silence du bonheur*”) are more sensual, more concrete, more dependent upon human society and human creations (Cim-a-rosa, Mozart, Shakespeare, Italian art) than those of the *Promeneur Solitaire*. Not until success and pleasure began to slip away from him, not until practical circumstances threatened to cut the ground from under his feet, did the society of his time become a problem and a subject to him. Rousseau did not find himself at home in the social world he encountered, which did not appreciably change during his lifetime; he rose in it without thereby becoming happier or more reconciled to it, while it appeared to remain unchanged. Stendhal lived while one earthquake after another shook the foundations of society; one of the earthquakes jarred him out of the ordinary course of life prescribed for men of his station, flung him, like many of his contemporaries, into previously inconceivable adventures, events, responsibilities, tests of himself, and experiences of freedom and power; another flung him back into a new life of triviality which he

thought more boring, more stupid, and less attractive than the old; the most interesting thing about it was that it too gave no promise of enduring; new upheavals were in the air, and indeed broke out here and there even though not with the power of the first.

Because Stendhal's interest arose out of the experiences of his own life, it was held not by the structure of a possible society but by the changes in the society actually given. Temporal dimensions are a factor of which he never loses sight, the concept of incessantly changing forms and manners of life dominates his thoughts: the more so as it is a hope for him—"In 1880 or 1930 I shall find readers who understand me!" I will cite a few examples. When he speaks of La Bruyère's "*esprit*" (*Henri Brulard*, chapter 30), it is apparent to him that this type of formative endeavor of the intellect has lost in validity since 1789: "*L'esprit, si délicieux pour qui le sent, ne dure pas. Comme une pêche passe en quelques jours, l'esprit passe en deux cents ans, et bien plus vite, s'il y a révolution dans les rapports que les classes d'une société ont entre elles.*" The *Souvenirs d'égotisme* contain an abundance of observations (for the most part truly prophetic) mounted on a perspective in time. He foresees (chapter 7, near the end) that "at the time when this chapter is read" it will have become a commonplace to make the ruling class responsible for the crimes of thieves and murderers; he fears, at the beginning of chapter 9, that all his bold utterances, which he dares put forth only with fear and trembling, will have become platitudes ten years after his death, if heaven grants him a decent allowance of life, say eighty or ninety years; in the next chapter he speaks of one of his friends who pays an unusually high price for the favors of an "*honnête femme du peuple*," and adds in explanation: "*cinq cents francs en 1832, c'est comme mille en 1872*" that is, forty years after the time at which he is writing and thirty after his death.

It would be possible to quote many more passages of the same import. But it is unnecessary, for the element of time-perspective is apparent everywhere in the presentation itself. In his realistic writings Stendhal everywhere deals with the reality which presents itself to him: "*Je prends au hasard ce qui se trouve sur ma route*," he says not far from the passage just quoted: in his effort to understand men, he does not pick and choose among them; this method, as Montaigne knew, is the best for eliminating the arbitrariness of one's own

constructions, and for surrendering oneself to reality as given. But the reality which he encountered was so constituted that, without permanent reference to the immense changes of the immediate past and without a premonitory searching after the imminent changes of the future, one could not represent it; all the human figures and all the human events in his work appear upon a ground politically and socially disturbed. To bring the significance of this graphically before us, we have but to compare him with the best-known realistic writers of the pre-Revolutionary eighteenth century: with Lesage or the Abbé Prevost, with the pre-eminent Henry Fielding or with Goldsmith; we have but to consider how much more accurately and profoundly he enters into given contemporary reality than Voltaire, Rousseau, and the youthful realistic work of Schiller, and upon how much broader a basis than Saint-Simon, whom, though in the very incomplete edition then available, he read assiduously. In so far as the serious realism of modern times cannot represent man otherwise than as embedded in a total reality, political, social, and economic, which is concrete and constantly evolving—as is the case today in any novel or film—Stendhal is its founder.

However, the attitude from which Stendhal apprehends circumstance and attempts to reproduce it with all its interconnections is as yet hardly influenced by Historicism—which, though it penetrated into France in his time, had little effect upon him. For that very reason we have referred in the last few pages to time-perspective and to a constant consciousness of changes and cataclysms, but not to a comprehension of evolutions. It is not too easy to describe Stendhal's inner attitude toward social phenomena. It is his aim to seize their every nuance; he most accurately represents the particular structure of any given milieu, he has no preconceived rationalistic system concerning the general factors which determine social life, nor any pattern-concept of how the ideal society ought to look; but in particulars his representation of circumstance is oriented, wholly in the spirit of classic ethical psychology, upon an "*analyse du coeur humain*," not upon discovery or premonition of historical forces; we find rationalistic, empirical, sensual motifs in him, but hardly those of Romantic Historicism. Absolutism, religion and the Church, the privileges of rank, he regarded very much as would an average *philosophe*, that is as a web of superstition, deceit, and intrigue;

artfully contrived intrigue in particular (together with passion) plays a decisive role in his plot construction, while the historical forces which are the basis of it hardly appear. Naturally all this can be explained by his political viewpoint, which was democratic-republican; this alone sufficed to render him immune to Romantic Historicism; besides which the emphatic manner of such writers as Chateaubriand displeased him in the extreme. On the other hand, he treats even the classes of society which, according to his views, should be closest to him, extremely critically and without a trace of the emotional values which Romanticism attached to the word "people." The practically active bourgeoisie with its respectable money-making, inspired him with unconquerable boredom, he shudders at the "*vertu républicaine*" of the United States, and despite his ostensible lack of sentimentality he regrets the fall of the *ancien régime*. "*Ma foi, l'esprit manque,*" he writes in chapter 30 of *Henri Brulard*, "*chacun réserve toutes ses forces pour un métier qui lui donne un rang dans le monde.*" No longer is birth or intelligence or the self-cultivation of the *honnête homme* the deciding factor—it is ability in some profession. This is no world in which Stendhal-Dominique can live and breathe. Of course, like his heroes, he too can work and work efficiently, when that is what is called for. But how can one take anything like practical professional work seriously in the long run! Love, music, passion, intrigue, heroism—these are the things that make life worthwhile. . . .

Stendhal is an aristocratic son of the *ancien régime grande bourgeoisie*, he will and can be no nineteenth-century bourgeois. He says it himself time and again: My views were Republican even in my youth but my family handed down their aristocratic instincts to me (*Brulard*, ch. 14); since the Revolution theater audiences have become stupid; I was a liberal myself (in 1821), and yet I found the liberals outrageously silly (*Souvenirs d'égotisme*, ch. 6); to converse with a prominent provincial merchant makes me dull and unhappy all day (*Egotisme*, ch. 7 and *passim*)—these and similar remarks, which sometimes also refer to his physical constitution ("*Le nature m'a donné les nerfs délicats et la peau sensible d'une femme,*" *Brulard*, ch. 32), occur plentifully. Sometimes he has pronounced accesses of socialism: in 1811, he writes, energy was to be found only in the class "*qui est en lutte avec les vrais besoins*" (*Brulard*, ch. 2). But

he finds the smell and the noise of the masses unendurable, and in his books, outspokenly realistic though they are in other respects, we find no "people," either in the Romantic "folk" sense or in the socialist sense—only petty-bourgeois, and occasional accessory figures such as soldiers, domestic servants, and coffee-house mademoiselles. Finally, he sees the individual man far less as the product of his historical situation and as taking part in it, than as an atom within it; a man seems to have been thrown almost by chance into the milieu in which he lives; it is a resistance with which he can deal more or less successfully, not really a culture-medium with which he is organically connected. In addition, Stendhal's conception of mankind is on the whole preponderantly materialistic and sensual; an excellent illustration of this occurs in *Henri Brulard* (ch. 26): "*J'appelle caractère d'un homme sa manière habituelle d'aller à la chasse du bonheur, en termes plus claires, mais moins qualificatifs, l'ensemble de ses habitudes morales.*" But happiness, even though, for Stendhal too, it can be found only in the mind, in art, passion, or fame, always has a far more sensual and earthy coloring in him than in the Romanticists. His aversion to philistine efficiency, to the type of bourgeois that was coming into existence, could be Romantic too. But a Romantic would hardly conclude a passage on his distaste for money-making with the words: "*J'ai eu le rare plaisir de faire toute ma vie à peu près ce qui me plaisait*" (*Brulard*, ch. 32).

His conception of *esprit* and of freedom is still entirely that of the pre-Revolutionary eighteenth century, although it is only with effort and a little spasmodically that he succeeds in realizing it in his own person. For freedom he has to pay the price of poverty and his *esprit* easily becomes paradox, bitter and wounding: "*une gaité qui fait peur*" (*Brulard*, ch. 6). His *esprit* no longer has the self-assurance and freedom from problems of the Voltaire period; he manages neither his social life nor that particularly important part of it, his sexual relations, with the easy mastery of a gentleman of rank of the *ancien régime*; he even goes so far as to say that he cultivated *esprit* only to conceal his passion for a woman whom he did not possess—"cette peur, mille fois répétée, a été, dans le fait, le principe dirigeant de ma vie pendant dix ans" (*Egotisme*, ch. 1). Such traits make him appear a man born too late who tries in vain to realize the mode of life of a past period; other elements of his

character, the merciless objectivity of his realistic power, his courageous assertion of his personality against the triviality of the rising *juste milieu*, and much more, show him as the forerunner of certain later intellectual and vital modes; but he always feels the reality of his period as a resistance. That very thing makes his realism (though it proceeded, if at all, to only a very slight degree from a loving genetic comprehension of evolutions—that is, from historical thinking) so energetic and so closely connected with his own existence: the realism of this *cheval ombrageux* is a product of his fight for self-assertion. And this explains the fact that the stylistic level of his great realistic novels is much closer to the old great and heroic idea of tragedy than is that of most realists—Julien Sorel is much more a “hero” than the characters of Balzac or even of Flaubert.

In another respect, to be sure, as we have already intimated, he is very close to his Romantic contemporaries—in the fight against the stylistic boundary between the realistic and the tragic. Here he excels them, for he is far more consistent and genuine, and it was on the basis of this solidarity that he was able to appear as a partisan of the new trend in 1822.

That the rule of style promulgated by classical aesthetics which excluded any material realism from serious tragic works was already giving way in the eighteenth century is well known. Even in France the relaxation of this rule can be observed as early as the first half of the eighteenth century; during the second half, it was Diderot particularly who propagated a more intermediate style both in theory and in practice, but he did not pass beyond the boundaries of the bourgeois and the pathetic. In his novels, especially in the *Neveu de Rameau*, characters from everyday life and of intermediate if not low station are portrayed with a certain seriousness; but the seriousness is more reminiscent of the moral and satirical writing of the Enlightenment than of nineteenth-century realism. In the figure and the work of Rousseau there is unmistakably a germ of the later evolution. Rousseau, as Meinecke says in his *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (II, 390), was able “even though he did not attain to complete historical thinking, to help in awakening the new sense of the individual merely through the revelation of his own unique individuality.” Meinecke is here speaking of historical thinking; but a corresponding statement may be made in respect to realism. Rousseau is not properly

realistic; to his material—especially when it is his own life—he brings such a strongly apologetic and ethico-critical interest, his judgment of events is so influenced by his principles of natural law, that the reality of the social world does not become for him an immediate subject; yet the example of the *Confessions*, which attempts to represent his own existence in its true relation to contemporary life, is important as a stylistic model for writers who had more sense of reality as given than he. Perhaps even more important in its indirect influence upon serious realism is his politicizing of the idyllic concept of Nature. This created a wish-image for the design of life which, as we know, exercised an immense power of suggestion and which, it was believed, could be immediately realized by a revolution; the wish-image soon showed itself to be in absolute opposition to the established historical reality, and the contrast grew stronger and more tragic the more apparent it became that the realization of the wish-image was miscarrying. Thus practical historical reality became a problem in a way hitherto unknown—far more concretely and far more immediately.

In the first decades after Rousseau's death, in French pre-Romanticism, the effect of that immense disillusionment was, to be sure, quite the opposite: it showed itself, among the most important writers, in a tendency to flee from contemporary reality. The Revolution, the Empire, and even the Restoration are poor in realistic literary works. The heroes of pre-Romantic novels betray a sometimes almost morbid aversion to entering into contemporary life. The contradiction between the natural, which he desired, and the historically based reality which he encountered, had already become tragic for Rousseau; but the very contradiction had roused him to do battle for the natural. He was no longer alive when the Revolution and Napoleon created a situation which, though new, was, in his sense of the word, no more "natural" but instead again entangled historically. The next generation, deeply influenced by his ideas and hopes, experienced the victorious resistance of the real and the historical, and it was especially those who had fallen most deeply under Rousseau's fascination, who found themselves not at home in the world which had utterly destroyed their hopes. They entered into opposition to it or they turned away from it. Of Rousseau they carried on only the inward rift, the tendency to flee from society,

the need to retire and to be alone; the other side of Rousseau's nature, the revolutionary and fighting side, they had lost. The outward circumstances which destroyed the unity of intellectual life and the dominating influence of literature in France also contributed to this development; from the outbreak of the Revolution to the fall of Napoleon there is hardly a literary work of any consequence which did not exhibit symptoms of this flight from contemporary reality, and such symptoms are still very prevalent among the Romantic groups after 1820. They appear most purely and most completely in Senancour. But in its very negativeness the attitude of the majority of pre-Romantics to the historical reality of their time is far more seriously problematic than is the attitude of the society of the Enlightenment. The Rousseauist movement and the great disillusionment it underwent was a prerequisite for the rise of the modern conception of reality. Rousseau, by passionately contrasting the natural condition of man with the existing facts of life determined by history, made the latter a practical problem; now for the first time the eighteenth-century style of historically unproblematic and unmoved presentation of life became valueless.

Romanticism, which had taken shape much earlier in Germany and England, and whose historical and individualistic trends had long been in preparation in France, reached its full development after 1820; and, as we know, it was precisely the principle of a mixture of styles which Victor Hugo and his friends made the slogan of their movement; in that principle the contrast to the classical treatment of subjects and the classical literary language stood out most obviously. Yet in Hugo's formula there is something too pointedly antithetical; for him it is a matter of mixing the sublime and the grotesque. These are both extremes of style which give no consideration to reality. And in practice he did not aim at understandingly bestowing form upon reality as given; rather, in dealing both with historical and contemporary subjects, he elaborates the stylistic poles of the sublime and the grotesque, or other ethical and aesthetic antitheses, so that they clash; in this way very powerful effects are produced, for Hugo's command of expression is powerful and suggestive; but the effects are improbable and, as a reflection of human life, untrue.

Another writer of the Romantic generation, Balzac, who had as great a creative gift and far more closeness to reality, seized upon the representation of contemporary life as his own particular task and, together with Stendhal, can be regarded as the creator of modern realism. He was sixteen years younger than Stendhal, yet his first characteristic novels appeared at almost the same time as Stendhal's, that is, about 1830. To exemplify his method of presentation we shall first give his portrait of the pension mistress Madame Vauquer at the beginning of *Le Père Goriot* (1830). It is preceded by a very detailed description of the quarter in which the pension is located, of the house itself, of the two rooms on the ground floor; all this produces an intense impression of cheerless poverty, shabbiness, and dilapidation, and with the physical description the moral atmosphere is suggested. After the furniture of the dining room is described the mistress of the establishment herself finally appears:

Cette pièce est dans tout son lustre au moment où, vers sept heures du matin, le chat de Mme Vauquer précède sa maîtresse, saute sur les buffets, y flaire le lait que contiennent plusieurs jattes couvertes d'assiettes et fait entendre son ronron matinal. Bientôt la veuve se montre, attifée de son bonnet de tulle sous lequel pend un tour de faux cheveux mal mis; elle marche en traînant ses pantoufles grimacées. Sa face vieillotte, grassouillette, du milieu de laquelle sort un nez à bec de perroquet; ses petites mains potelées, sa personne dodue comme un rat d'église, son corsage trop plein et qui flotte, sont en harmonie avec cette salle où suinte le malheur, où s'est blottie la spéculation, et dont Mme Vauquer respire l'air chaudement fétide sans en être écoeurée. Sa figure fraîche comme une première gelée d'automne, ses yeux ridés, dont l'expression passe du sourire prescrit aux danseuses à l'amer renfrognement de l'escompteur, enfin toute sa personne explique la pension, comme la pension implique sa personne. Le bain ne va pas sans l'argousin, vous n'imaginerez pas l'un sans l'autre. L'embonpoint blafard de cette petite femme est le produit de cette vie, comme le typhus est la conséquence des exhalaisons d'un hôpital. Son jupon de laine tricotée, qui dépasse sa première jupe faite avec une vieille robe, et dont la ouate s'échappe par les fentes de l'étoffe lésardée, résume le salon, la salle à manger, le jardinet, annonce la cuisine et fait pressentir les pensionnaires. Quand elle est là, ce spectacle est complet. Agée d'environ cinquante ans, Mme Vauquer ressemble à toutes les femmes qui ont eu des malheurs. Elle a l'œil vitreux, l'air innocent d'une entremetteuse qui va se gendарmer pour se faire payer plus cher, mais d'ailleurs prête

à tout pour adoucir son sort, à livrer Georges ou Pichegru, si Georges ou Pichegru étaient encore à livrer. Néanmoins elle est bonne femme au fond, disent les pensionnaires, qui la croient sans fortune en l'entendant geindre et tousser comme eux. Qu'avait été M. Vauquer? Elle ne s'expliquait jamais sur le défunt. Comment avait-il perdu sa fortune? "Dans les malheurs," répondait-elle. Il s'était mal conduit envers elle, ne lui avait laissé que les yeux pour pleurer, cette maison pour vivre, et le droit de ne compatir à aucune infortune, parce que, disait-elle, elle avait souffert tout ce qu'il est possible de souffrir.

The portrait of the hostess is connected with her morning appearance in the dining-room; she appears in this center of her influence, the cat jumping onto the buffet before her gives a touch of witchcraft to her entrance; and then Balzac immediately begins a detailed description of her person. The description is controlled by a leading motif, which is several times repeated—the motif of the harmony between Madame Vauquer's person on the one hand and the room in which she is present, the pension which she directs, and the life which she leads, on the other; in short, the harmony between her person and what we (and Balzac too, occasionally) call her milieu. This harmony is most impressively suggested: first through the dilapidation, the greasiness, the dirtiness and warmth, the sexual repulsiveness of her body and her clothes—all this being in harmony with the air of the room which she breathes without disgust; a little later, in connection with her face and its expressions, the motif is conceived somewhat more ethically, and with even greater emphasis upon the complementary relation between the person and the milieu: "*sa personne explique la pension, comme la pension implique sa personne*"; with this goes the comparison to the prison. There follows a more medical concept, in which Madame Vauquer's "*embonpoint blafard*" as a symptom of her life is compared to typhoid as the result of the exhalations of a hospital. Finally her petticoat is appraised as a sort of synthesis of the various rooms of the pension, as a foretaste of the products of the kitchen, and as a premonition of the guests; for a moment her petticoat becomes a symbol of the milieu, and then the whole is epitomized again in the sentence: "*Quand elle est là, ce spectacle est complet*"—one need, then, wait no longer for the breakfast and the guests, they are all included in her person. There seems to be no deliberate order for

the various repetitions of the harmony-motif, nor does Balzac appear to have followed a systematic plan in describing Madame Vauquer's appearance; the series of things mentioned—headdress, false hair, slippers, face, hands, body, the face again, eyes, corpulence, petticoat—reveal no trace of composition; nor is there any separation of body and clothing, of physical characteristics and moral significance.

The entire description, so far as we have yet considered it, is directed to the mimetic imagination of the reader, to his memory-pictures of similar persons and similar milieux which he may have seen; the thesis of the "stylistic unity" of the milieu, which includes the people in it, is not established rationally but is presented as a striking and immediately apprehended state of things, purely suggestive, in no way proved. In such a statement as the following, "*ses petites mains potelées, sa personne dodue comme un rat d'église . . . sont en harmonie avec cette salle où suinte le malheur . . . et dont Mme Vauquer respire l'air chaudement fétide . . .*" the harmony-thesis, with all that it includes (sociological and ethical significance of furniture and clothing, the deducibility of the as yet unseen elements of the milieu from those already given, etc.) is presupposed; the mention of prison and typhoid too are merely suggestive comparisons, not proofs nor even beginnings of proofs. The lack of order and disregard for the rational in the text are consequences of the haste with which Balzac worked, but they are nevertheless no mere accident, for his haste is itself in large part a consequence of his obsession with suggestive pictures. The theme of the unity of a milieu has taken hold of him so powerfully that the things and the persons making up a milieu often acquire for him a second significance which, though different from that which reason can comprehend, is far more essential—a significance which can best be defined by the adjective "demonic." In the dining-room, with its furniture which, worn and shabby though it be, is perfectly harmless to a reason uninfluenced by imagination, "misfortune oozes, speculation cowers." In this trivial everyday scene allegorical witches lie hidden, and instead of the plump sloppily dressed widow one momentarily sees a rat appear. What confronts us, then, is the unity of a particular milieu, felt as a total concept of a demonic-organic nature and presented entirely by suggestive and sensory means.

The next part of our passage, in which the harmony-motif is

not again mentioned, pursues Madame Vauquer's character and previous history. It would be a mistake, however, to see in this separation of appearance on the one hand and character and previous history on the other a deliberate principle of composition; there are physical characteristics in this second part too ("*l'oeil vitreux*"), and Balzac very frequently makes a different disposition, or mingles the physical, moral, and historical elements of a portrait indiscriminately. In our case his pursuit of her character and previous history does not serve to clarify either of them but rather to set Madame Vauquer's darkness "in the right light," that is, in the twilight of a petty and trivial demonism. So far as her previous history goes, the pension-mistress belongs to the category of women of fifty or thereabouts "*qui ont eu des malheurs*" (plural!); Balzac enlightens us not at all concerning her previous life, but instead reproduces, partly in free indirect discourse, the formless, whining, mendaciously colloquial chatter with which she habitually answers sympathetic inquiries. But here again the suspicious plural occurs, again avoiding particulars—her late husband had lost his money "*dans les malheurs*"—just as, some pages later, another suspicious widow imparts, on the subject of her husband who had been a count and a general, that he had fallen on "*les champs de bataille*." This conforms to the vulgar demonism of Madame Vauquer's character; she seems "*bonne femme au fond*," she seems poor, but, as we are later told, she has a very tidy little fortune and she is capable of any baseness in order to improve her own situation a little—the vulgar and trivial narrowness of the goal of her egoism, the mixture of stupidity, slyness, and concealed vitality, again gives the impression of something repulsively spectral; again there imposes itself the comparison with a rat, or with some other animal making a vulgarly demonic impression on the human imagination. The second part of the description, then, is a supplement to the first; after Madame Vauquer is presented in the first as synthesizing the milieu she governs, the second deepens the impenetrability and abjectness of her character, which is constrained to work itself out in the aforesaid milieu.

In his entire work, as in this passage, Balzac feels his milieux, different though they are, as organic and indeed demonic unities, and seeks to convey this feeling to the reader. He not only, like Stendhal,

places the human beings whose destiny he is seriously relating, in their precisely defined historical and social setting, but also conceives this connection as a necessary one: to him every milieu becomes a moral and physical atmosphere which impregnates the landscape, the dwelling, furniture, implements, clothing, physique, character, surroundings, ideas, activities, and fates of men, and at the same time the general historical situation reappears as a total atmosphere which envelops all its several milieux. It is worth noting that he did this best and most truthfully for the circle of the middle and lower Parisian bourgeoisie and for the provinces; while his representation of high society is often melodramatic, false, and unintentionally comic. He is not free from melodramatic exaggeration elsewhere; but whereas in the middle and lower spheres this only occasionally impairs the truthfulness of the whole, he is unable to create the true atmosphere of the higher spheres—including those of the intellect.

Balzac's atmospheric realism is a product of his period, is itself a part and a result of an atmosphere. The same intellectual attitude—namely Romanticism—which first felt the atmospheric unity-of-style of earlier periods so strongly and so sensuously, which discovered the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as well as the historical idiosyncrasy of foreign cultures (Spain, the Orient)—this same intellectual attitude also developed organic comprehension of the atmospheric uniqueness of its own period in all its manifold forms. Atmospheric Historicism and atmospheric Realism are closely connected; Michelet and Balzac are borne on the same stream. The events which occurred in France between 1792 and 1815, and their effects during the next decade, caused modern contemporaneous realism to develop first and most strongly there, and its political and cultural unity gave France, in this respect, a long start over Germany; French reality, in all its multifariousness, could be comprehended as a whole. Another Romantic current which contributed, no less than did Romantic penetration into the total atmosphere of a milieu, to the development of modern realism, was the mixture of styles to which we have so often referred; this made it possible for characters of any station, with all the practical everyday complications of their lives—Julien Sorel as well as old Goriot or Madame Vauquer—to become the subject of serious literary representation.

These general considerations appear to me cogent; it is far

more difficult to describe with any accuracy the mental disposition dominating Balzac's own particular manner of presentation. The statements which he himself makes on the subject are numerous and provide many clues, but they are confused and contradictory; the richer he is in ideas and inspirations, the less he is able to separate the various elements of his own disposition, to channel the influx of suggestive but vague images and comparisons into intellectual analyses, and especially to adopt a critical attitude toward the stream of his own inspiration. All his intellectual analyses, although full of isolated observations which are striking and original, come in the end to a fanciful macroscopy which suggests his contemporary Hugo; whereas what is needed to explain his realistic art is precisely a careful separation of the currents which mingle in it.

In the *Avant-propos* to the *Comédie humaine* (published 1842) Balzac begins his explanation of his work with a comparison between the animal kingdom and human society, in which he accepts the guidance of Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire's theories. This biologist, under the influence of contemporary German speculative natural philosophy, had upheld the principle of tygal unity in organization, that is, the idea that in the organization of plants (and animals) there is a general plan; Balzac here refers to the systems of other mystics, philosophers, and biologists (Swedenborg, Saint-Martin, Leibnitz, Buffon, Bonnet, Needham) and finally arrives at the following formulation: "*Le créateur ne s'est servi que d'un seul et même patron pour tous les êtres organisés. L'animal est un principe qui prend sa forme extérieure, ou, pour parler plus exactement, les différences de sa forme, dans les milieux où il est appelé à se développer. . .*" This principle is at once transferred to human society: "*La Société* [with a capital, as Nature shortly before] *ne fait-elle pas de l'homme, suivant les milieux où son action se déploie, autant d'hommes différents qu'il y a de variétés en zoologie?*" And then he compares the differences between a soldier, a workman, an administrative employee, an idler, a scholar, a statesman, a shopkeeper, a seaman, a poet, a pauper, a priest, with those between wolf, lion, ass, raven, shark, and so on. . . .

Our first conclusion is that he is here attempting to establish his views of human society (typical man differentiated by his milieu) by biological analogies; the word "milieu," which here appears for

the first time in the sociological sense and which was to have such a successful career (Taine seems to have adopted it from Balzac), he learned from Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, who for his part had transferred it from physical science to biology; now it makes its way from biology to sociology. The biologism present in Balzac's mind, as may be deduced from the names he cites, is mystical, speculative, and vitalistic; however, the model-concept, the principle "animal" or "man" is not taken as immanent but, so to speak, as a real Platonic idea; the various genera and species are only "*formes extérieures*"; furthermore, they are themselves given not as changing in accordance with their inner laws but as fixed (a soldier, a workman, etc., like a lion, an ass). The particular meaning of the concept "milieu," as he uses it in his novels, he here seems not to have fully realized. Not the word, but the thing—milieu in the social sense—existed long before him; Montesquieu unmistakably has the concept; but whereas Montesquieu gives much more consideration to natural conditions (climate, soil) than to those which spring from human history, and whereas he attempts to construe the different milieux as unchanging model-concepts to which the appropriate constitutional and legislative models can be applied, Balzac in practice remains entirely within the orbit of the historical and perpetually changing structural elements of his milieux; and no reader arrives unassisted at the idea which Balzac appears to maintain in his preface, that he is concerned only with the type "man" or with generic types ("soldier," "shopkeeper"): what we see is the concrete individual figure with its own physique and its own history, sprung from the immanence of the historical, social, physical, etc. situation; not "the soldier" but, for example, Colonel Brideau, discharged after the fall of Napoleon, ruined and leading the life of an adventurer in Issoudun (*La Rabouilleuse*).

After his bold comparison of zoological with sociological differentiation, however, Balzac attempts to bring out the distinguishing characteristics of *la Société* as against *la Nature*; he sees them above all in the far greater multifariousness of human life and human customs, as well as in the possibility—nonexistent in the animal kingdom—of changing from one species to another ("*l'épicier . . . devient pair de France, et le noble descend parfois au dernier rang social*"; furthermore, different species mate ("*la femme d'un mar-*

chand est quelquefois digne d'être celle d'un prince . . . ; dans la Société la femme ne se trouve pas toujours être la femelle d'un mâle"); he also refers to dramatic conflicts in love, which seldom occur among animals, and the different degrees of intelligence in different men. The epitomizing sentence reads: "*L'Etat social a des hasards que ne se permet pas la Nature, car il est la Nature plus la Société.*" Inaccurate and macroscopic as this passage is, badly as it suffers from the *proton pseudos* of the underlying comparison, it yet contains an instinctive historical insight ("*les habitudes, les vêtements, les paroles, les demeures . . . changent au gré des civilisations*"; there is much, too, of dynamism and vitalism ("*si quelques savants n'admettent encore que l'Animalité se transborde dans l'Humanité par un immense courant de vie . . .*"). The particular possibilities of comprehension between man and man are not mentioned—not even in the negative formulation that, as compared with man, the animal lacks them; on the contrary, the relative simplicity of the social and psychological life of animals is presented as an objective fact, and only at the very end is there any indication of the subjective character of such judgments: "*. . . les habitudes de chaque animal sont, à nos yeux du moins, constamment semblables en tout temps. . .*"

After this transition from biology to human history, Balzac continues with a polemic against the prevailing type of historical writing and reproaches it with having long neglected the history of manners; this is the task which *he* has set himself. He does not mention the attempts at a history of manners which had been made since the eighteenth century (Voltaire); hence there is no analysis setting forth the distinction between his presentation of manners and that of his possible predecessors; only Petronius is named. Considering the difficulties of his task (a drama with three or four thousand characters) he feels encouraged by the example of Walter Scott; so here we are completely within the world of Romantic Historicism. Here too clarity of thought is often impaired by striking and fanciful formulations; for example "*faire concurrence à l'Etat-Civil*" is equivocal, and the statement "*le hasard est le plus grand romancier du monde*" requires some explanation if it is to tally with its author's historical attitude. But a number of important and characteristic motifs emerge successfully: above all the concept of

the novel of manners as philosophical history, and, in general, Balzac's conception (which he upholds energetically elsewhere) of his own activity as the writing of history, to which we shall later return; also his justification of all stylistic genres and levels in works of this nature; finally his design of going beyond Walter Scott by making all his novels compose a single whole, a general presentation of French society in the nineteenth century, which he here again calls a historical work.

But this does not exhaust his plan; he intends also to render a separate account of "*les raisons ou la raison de ces efforts sociaux*," and when he has succeeded in at least investigating "*ce moteur social*," his final intention is "*méditer sur les principes naturels et voir en quoi les Sociétés s'écartent ou se rapprochent de la règle éternelle, du vrai, du beau*?" We need not here discuss the fact that it was not given to him to make a successful theoretical presentation, outside the frame of a narrative, and hence he could only attempt to realize his theoretical plans in the form of novels; here it is only of interest to note that the "immanent" philosophy of his novels of manners did not satisfy him and that in the passage before us this dissatisfaction, after so many biological and historical expositions, induces him to employ classical model-concepts ("*la règle éternelle du vrai, du beau*")—categories which he can no longer utilize practically in his novels.

All these motifs—biological, historical, classicizing-moral—are in fact scattered through his work. He has a great fondness for biological comparisons; he speaks of physiology or zoology in connection with social phenomena, with the "*anatomie du coeur humain*"; in the passage commented on above he compares the effect of a social milieu to the exhalations which produce typhoid, and in another passage from *Père Goriot* he says of Rastignac that he had given himself up to the lessons and the temptations of luxury "*avec l'ardeur dont est saisi l'impatient calice d'un dattier femelle pour les fécondantes poussières de son hymenée*." It is needless to cite historical motifs, for the spirit of Historicism with its emphasis upon ambient and individual atmospheres is the spirit of his entire work; I will, however, quote at least one of many passages to show that historical concepts were always in his mind. The passage is from the provincial novel *La vieille Fille*; it concerns two elderly gentlemen who live in Alençon, the one a typical *ci-devant*, the other a bankrupt Revolu-

tionary profiteer: "*Les époques déteignent sur les hommes qui les traversent. Ces deux personnages prouvaient la vérité de cet axiome par l'opposition des teintes historiques empreintes dans leurs physionomies, dans leurs discours, dans leurs idées et leurs coutumes.*" And in another passage from the same novel, in reference to a house in Alençon, he speaks of the *archétype* which it represents; here we have not the archetype of a nonhistorical abstraction but that of the *maisons bourgeoises* of a large part of France; the house, whose piquant local character he has previously described, deserves its place in the novel all the more, he says, "*qu'il explique des moeurs et représente des idées.*"

Despite many obscurities and exaggerations, biological and historical elements are successfully combined in Balzac's work because they are both consonant with its Romantic-dynamic character, which occasionally passes over into the Romantic-magical and the demonic; in both cases one feels the operation of irrational "forces." In contrast, the classicizing-moral element very often gives the impression of being a foreign body. It finds expression more especially in Balzac's tendency to formulate generalized apophthegms of a moral cast. They are sometimes witty as individual observations, but for the most part they are far too generalized; sometimes too they are not even witty; and when they develop into long disquisitions, they are often—to use the language of the vulgar—mere "hogwash." I will quote some brief moralizing dicta which occur in *Père Goriot*:

Le bonheur est la poésie des femmes comme la toilette en est le fard.—[La science et l'amour . . .] sont des asymptotes qui ne peuvent jamais se rejoindre. —S'il est un sentiment inné dans le coeur de l'homme, n'est-ce pas l'orgueil de la protection exercé à tout moment en faveur d'un être faible?—Quand on connaît Paris, on ne croit à rien de ce qui s'y dit, et l'on ne dit rien de ce qui s'y fait.—Un sentiment, n'est-ce pas le monde dans une pensée?

At best one can say of such apophthegms that they do not deserve the honor bestowed upon them—that of being erected into generalizations. They are *aperçus* produced by the momentary situation, sometimes extremely cogent, sometimes absurd, not always in good taste. Balzac aspires to be a classical moralist, sometimes he even echoes La Bruyère (e.g., in a passage from *Père Goriot* where the physical and psychological effects of the possession of money are

described in connection with the remittance Rastignac receives from his family). But this suits neither his style nor his temperament. His best formulations come to him in the midst of narrative, when he is not thinking about moralizing—for example when in the *Vieille Fille* he says of Mademoiselle Cormon, directly out of the momentary situation: "*Honteuse elle-même, elle ne devinait pas l'honte d'autrui.*"

On the subject of his plan for his entire work, which gradually took shape in him, he has other interesting statements, particularly from the period when he finally saw it whole—in his letters of about 1834. In this self-interpretation three themes are especially to be remarked; all three occur together in a letter to the Countess Hanska (*Lettres à l'Etrangère*, Paris 1899, letter of Oct. 26, 1834, pp. 200-206) where (p. 205) we read:

Les Etudes de Moeurs représenteront tous les effets sociaux sans que ni une situation de la vie, ni une physionomie, ni un caractère d'homme ou de femme, ni une manière de vivre, ni une profession, ni une zone sociale, ni un pays français, ni quoi que ce soit de l'enfance, de la vieillesse, de l'âge mûr, de la politique, de la justice, de la guerre ait été oublié.

Cela posé, l'histoire du coeur humain tracée fil à fil, l'histoire sociale faite dans toutes ses parties, voilà la base. Ce ne seront pas des faits imaginaires; ce sera ce qui se passe partout.

Of the three motifs to which I have referred, two are immediately apparent; first, the universality of his plan, his concept of his work as an encyclopedia of life; no part of life is to be omitted. Second, the element of random reality—"ce qui se passe partout." The third motif lies in the word "*histoire.*" This "*histoire du coeur humain*" or "*histoire sociale*" is not a matter of "history" in the usual sense—not of scientific investigation of transactions which have already occurred, but one of comparatively free invention, not, in short, of "history" but of "fiction"; not, above all, a matter of the past but of the contemporary present, reaching back at most but a few years or a few decades. If Balzac describes his *Etudes de Moeurs au dix-neuvième siècle* as history (just as Stendhal had already given his novel *Le Rouge et le Noir* the subtitle *Chronique du dix-neuvième siècle*), this means, first, that he regards his creative and artistic activity as equivalent to an activity of an historical-interpretative and even historical-philosophical nature, as his *Avant-propos* in

itself makes it possible to deduce; secondly, that he conceives the present as history—the present *is* present, being a story resulting from history. And in practice his people and his atmospheres, contemporary as they may be, are always represented as phenomena sprung from historical events and forces; one has but to read over, say, the account of the origin of Grandet's income (*Eugénie Grandet*), or that of Du Bousquier's life (*La vieille Fille*) or Old Goriot's, to be certain of this. Nothing of the sort so conscious and so detailed is to be found before the appearance of Stendhal and Balzac, and the latter far outdoes the former in organically connecting man and history. Such a conception and execution are wholly historical.

We will now return to the second motif—“*ce ne seront pas des faits imaginaires; ce sera ce qui se passe partout.*” What is expressed here is that the source of his invention is not free imagination but real life, as it presents itself everywhere. Now, in respect to this manifold life, steeped in history, mercilessly represented with all its triviality, practical preoccupations, ugliness, and vulgarity, Balzac has an attitude such as Stendhal had had before him: in the form determined by its actuality, its triviality, its inner historical laws, he takes it seriously, and even tragically. This, since the rise of classical taste, had occurred nowhere—not even in Balzac's own practical and historical manner, oriented as it is upon a social self-accounting of man. Since French Classicism and Absolutism the treatment of ordinary reality had not only become much more circumscribed and decorous, but moreover a tragic or problematic view of this reality was excluded. We have attempted to analyze this in the preceding chapters: a subject from practical reality could be treated comically, satirically, or moralistically; certain subjects from definite and limited realms of contemporary everyday life attained to an intermediate style, the pathetic; but beyond that they might not go. The real everyday life of even the middle ranks of society belong to the vulgar style; the profound and important Henry Fielding, who touches upon so many moral, aesthetic, and social problems, keeps his presentation steadily within the satiric-ethical key and says in *Tom Jones* (Book XIV, chapter 1): “. . . that kind of novels which, like this I am writing, is of the comic class.”

The entrance of existential and tragic seriousness into realism, as we observe it in Stendhal and Balzac, is indubitably closely con-

nected with the great Romantic agitation for the mixture of styles—the movement whose slogan was “Shakespeare vs. Racine”—and I consider Stendhal’s and Balzac’s form of it, the mixture of seriousness and everyday reality, more important than the form it took in the Hugo group, which set out to unite the sublime and the grotesque.

The newness of this attitude, and the new type of subjects which were seriously, problematically, tragically treated, caused the development of an entirely new kind of serious or, if one prefers, elevated style; neither the Antique nor the Christian nor the Shakespearean nor the Racinian level of conception and expression could easily be transferred to the new subjects; at first there was some uncertainty in regard to the kind of serious attitude to be assumed.

Stendhal, whose realism had sprung from resistance to a present which he despised, preserved many eighteenth-century instincts in his attitude. In his heroes there are still haunting memories of figures like Romeo, Don Juan, Valmont (from the *Liaisons dangereuses*), and Saint-Preux; above all, the figure of Napoleon remains alive in him; the heroes of his novels think and feel in opposition to their time, only with contempt do they descend to the intrigues and machinations of the post-Napoleonic present. Although there is always an admixture of motifs which, according to the older view, would have the character of comedy, it remains true of him that a figure for whom he feels tragic sympathy, and for whom he demands it of the reader, must be a real hero, great and daring in his thoughts and passions. In Stendhal the freedom of the great heart, the freedom of passion, still has much of the aristocratic loftiness and of the playing with life which are more characteristic of the *ancien régime* than of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie.

Balzac plunges his heroes far more deeply into time-conditioned dependency; he thereby loses the standards and limits of what had earlier been felt as tragic, and he does not yet possess the objective seriousness toward modern reality which later developed. He bombastically takes every entanglement as tragic, every urge as a great passion; he is always ready to declare every person in misfortune a hero or a saint; if it is a woman, he compares her to an angel or the Madonna; every energetic scoundrel, and above all every figure who is at all gloomy, he converts into a demon; and he calls poor old Goriot “*ce Christ de la paternité*.” It was in conformity with

his emotional, fiery, and uncritical temperament, as well as with the Romantic way of life, to sense hidden demonic forces everywhere and to exaggerate expression to the point of melodrama.

In the next generation, which comes on the stage in the fifties, there is a strong reaction in this respect. In Flaubert realism becomes impartial, impersonal, and objective. In a previous study on "Serious Imitation of Everyday Life" I analyzed a paragraph from *Madame Bovary* from this point of view, and will here, with slight changes and abridgments, reproduce the pages concerned, since they are congruous with the present train of thought and since it is unlikely, in view of the time and place of their publication (Istanbul, 1937), that they have reached many readers. The paragraph concerned occurs in Part I, chapter 9, of *Madame Bovary*:

Mais c'était surtout aux heures des repas qu'elle n'en pouvait plus, dans cette petite salle au rez-de-chaussée, avec le poêle qui fumait, la porte qui criait, les murs qui suintaient, les pavés humides; toute l'amertume de l'existence lui semblait servie sur son assiette, et, à la fumée du bouilli, il montait du fond de son âme comme d'autres bouffées d'affadissement. Charles était long à manger; elle grignotait quelques noisettes, ou bien, appuyée du coude, s'amusait, avec la pointe de son couteau, de faire des raies sur la toile cirée.

The paragraph forms the climax of a presentation whose subject is Emma Bovary's dissatisfaction with her life in Tostes. She has long hoped for a sudden event which would give a new turn to it—her life without elegance, adventure, and love, in the depths of the provinces, beside a mediocre and boring husband; she has even made preparations for such an event, has lavished care on herself and her house, as if to earn that turn of fate, to be worthy of it; when it does not come, she is seized with unrest and despair. All this Flaubert describes in several pictures which portray Emma's world as it now appears to her; its cheerlessness, unvaryingness, grayness, staleness, airlessness, and inescapability now first become clearly apparent to her when she has no more hope of fleeing from it. Our paragraph is the culmination of the portrayal of her despair. Next we are told how she lets everything in her house go, neglects herself and begins to sicken, so that her husband decides to leave Tostes, thinking that the climate does not agree with her.

The paragraph itself presents a picture—man and wife together at meals. But the picture is not presented in and for itself; it is subordinated to the dominant subject, Emma's despair. Hence it is not put before the reader directly; here the two sit at table—there the reader stands watching them. But the reader first sees Emma, who has been much in evidence in the preceding pages, and he sees the picture first through her; directly he sees only Emma's inner state, he sees what goes on at the meal indirectly, from within her state, in the light of her perception. The first words of the paragraph, "*Mais c'était surtout aux heures des repas qu'elle n'en pouvait plus . . .*" state the theme, and all that follows is but a development of it. Not only are the specifying phrases dependent upon "*dans*" and "*avec*," which define the physical scene, a commentary on "*elle n'en pouvait plus*" in their piling up of the individual elements of discomfort, but the following clause too, which tells of the distaste aroused in her by the food, accords with the principal aim both in sense and rhythm. When we read further, "*Charles était long à manger*," this, though grammatically a new sentence and rhythmically a new movement, is still only a resumption, a variation, of the principal theme; not until we come to the contrast between his leisurely eating and her disgust and the nervous gestures of her despair, which are described immediately afterward, does the sentence acquire its true significance. The husband, unconcernedly eating, becomes ludicrous and almost ghastly; when Emma looks at him and sees him sitting there eating, he becomes the actual cause of her "*elle n'en pouvait plus*"; because everything else that arouses her desperation—the gloomy room, the commonplace food, the lack of a tablecloth, the hopelessness of it all—appears to her, and through her to the reader also, as something that is connected with him, that emanates from him, and that would be entirely different if he were different from what he is.

The situation, then, is not presented simply as a picture, but we are first given Emma and then the situation through her. It is not, however, a matter—as it is in many first-person novels and other later works of the same type—of a simple representation of the content of Emma's consciousness, of *what* she feels *as* she feels it. Though the light which illuminates the picture proceeds from her, she is yet herself part of the picture, she is situated within it. In this she recalls

the speaker in the scene from Petronius discussed in our second chapter; but the means Flaubert employs are different. Here it is not Emma who speaks, but the writer. "*Le poêle qui fumait, la porte qui criait, les murs qui suintaient, les pavés humides*"—all that, of course, Emma sees and feels, but she would not be able to sum it all up in this way. "*Toute l'amertume de l'existence lui semblait servie sur son assiette*"—she doubtless has such a feeling but if she wanted to express it, it would not come out like that; she has neither the intelligence nor the cold candor of self-accounting necessary to such a formulation. To be sure, there is nothing of Flaubert's life in these words, but only Emma's; Flaubert does nothing but bestow the power of mature expression upon the material which she affords, in its complete subjectivity. If Emma could do this herself, she would no longer be what she is, she would have outgrown herself and thereby saved herself. So she does not simply see, but is herself seen as one seeing, and is thus judged simply through a plain description of her subjective life, out of her own feelings. Reading in a later passage (Part II, chapter 12): "*jamais Charles ne lui paraissait aussi désagréable, avoir les doigts aussi carrés, l'esprit aussi lourd, les façons si communes . . .*" the reader perhaps thinks for a moment that this strange series is the emotional collocation of the causes that time and again bring Emma's aversion to her husband to the boiling point, and that she herself is, as it were, inwardly speaking these words; that this, then, is an example of "free indirect discourse." But this would be a mistake. We have here, to be sure, a number of paradigmatic causes of Emma's aversion, but they are collocated deliberately by the writer, not emotionally by Emma. For Emma feels much more, and much more confusedly; she sees other things than these—in his body, his manners, his dress; memories mix in, meanwhile she perhaps hears him speak, perhaps feels his hand, his breath, sees him walk about, good-hearted, limited, unappetizing, and unaware; she has countless confused impressions. The only thing that is clearly defined is the result of all this, her aversion to him, which she must hide. Flaubert transfers the clarity to the impressions; he selects three, apparently quite at random, but which are paradigmatically taken from his physique, his mentality, and his behavior; and he arranges them as if they were three shocks which Emma felt one after the other. This is not at all a naturalistic representation of the con-

sciousness. Natural shocks occur quite differently. The ordering hand of the writer is present here, deliberately summing up the confusion of the psychological situation in the direction toward which it tends of itself—the direction of “aversion to Charles Bovary.” This ordering of the psychological situation does not, to be sure, derive its standards from without, but from the material of the situation itself. It is the type of ordering which must be employed if the situation itself is to be translated into speech without admixture.

In a comparison of this type of presentation with those of Stendhal and Balzac, it is to be observed by way of introduction that here too the two distinguishing characteristics of modern realism are to be found; here too real everyday occurrences in a low social stratum, the provincial petty bourgeoisie, are taken very seriously (we shall discuss the particular character of this seriousness later); here too everyday occurrences are accurately and profoundly set in a definite period of contemporary history (the period of the bourgeois monarchy)—less obviously than in Stendhal or Balzac, but unmistakably. In these two basic attributes the three writers are at one, in contradistinction to all earlier realism; but Flaubert's attitude toward his subject is entirely different. In Stendhal and Balzac we frequently and indeed almost constantly hear what the writer thinks of his characters and events; sometimes Balzac accompanies his narrative with a running commentary—emotional or ironic or ethical or historical or economic. We also very frequently hear what the characters themselves think and feel, and often in such a manner that, in the passage concerned, the writer identifies himself with the character. Both these things are almost wholly absent from Flaubert's work. His opinion of his characters and events remains unspoken; and when the characters express themselves it is never in such a manner that the writer identifies himself with their opinion, or with the intent of making the reader identify himself with it. We hear the writer speak; but he expresses no opinion and makes no comment. His role is limited to choosing the events and translating them into language; and this is done in the conviction that every event, if one is able to express it purely and completely, interprets itself and the persons involved in it far better and more completely than any opinion or judgment appended to it could do. Upon this conviction—that is, upon a profound faith in the truth of language responsibly, candidly

and carefully employed—Flaubert's artistic practice rests. This is a very old, classic French tradition. There is already something of it in Boileau's line concerning the power of the rightly used word (on Malherbe: "*D'un mot mis en sa place enseigna le pouvoir*"); there are similar statements in La Bruyère. Vauvenargues said: "*Il n'y aurait point d'erreurs qui ne périssent d'elles-mêmes, exprimées clairement.*" Flaubert's faith in language goes further than Vauvenargues's: he believes that the truth of the phenomenal world is also revealed in linguistic expression.

Flaubert is a man who works extremely consciously and possesses a critical comprehension of art to a degree uncommon even in France; hence there occur in his letters, particularly of the years 1852-54 during which he was writing *Madame Bovary* ("*Troisième Série*" in the "*Nouvelle édition augmentée*" of the *Correspondance*, 1927), many highly informative statements on the subject of his aim in art. They lead to a theory—mystical in the last analysis, but in practice, like all true mysticism, based upon reason, experience and discipline—of a self-forgetting absorption in the subjects of reality which transforms them ("*par une chimie merveilleuse*") and permits them to develop to mature expression. In this fashion subjects completely fill the writer; he forgets himself, his heart no longer serves him save to feel the hearts of others, and when, by fanatical patience, this condition is achieved, the perfect expression, which at once entirely comprehends the momentary subject and impartially judges it, comes of itself; subjects are seen as God sees them, in their true essence. With all this there goes a view of the mixture of styles which proceeds from the same mystical-realistic insight: there are no high and low subjects; the universe is a work of art produced without any taking of sides, the realistic artist must imitate the procedures of creation, and every subject in its essence contains, in God's eyes, both the serious and the comic, both dignity and vulgarity; if it is rightly and surely reproduced, the level of style which is proper to it will be rightly and surely found; there is no need either for a general theory of levels, in which subjects are arranged according to their dignity, or for any analyses by the writer commenting upon the subject after its presentation with a view to better comprehension and more accurate classification; all this must result from the presentation of the subject itself.

It is illuminating to note the contrast between such a view and the grandiloquent and ostentatious parading of the writer's own feelings and of the standards derived therefrom such as had been begun by Rousseau and was continued after him; a comparative interpretation of Flaubert's "*Notre coeur ne doit être bon qu'à sentir celui des autres,*" and Rousseau's statement at the beginning of the *Confessions*, "*Je sens mon coeur, et je connais les hommes,*" could effectually represent the change in position which had taken place. But it also becomes clear from Flaubert's letters how laboriously and with what tensify of application he had attained to his convictions. Great subjects, and the free, irresponsible rule of the creative imagination, still have a great attraction for him; from this point of view he sees Shakespeare, Cervantes, and even Hugo wholly through the eyes of a Romanticist, and he sometimes curses his own narrow petty-bourgeois subject which forces him to tiresome stylistic meticulousness ("*dire à la fois simplement et proprement des choses vulgaires*"); this sometimes goes so far that he says things which contradict his basic views: "*. . . et ce qu'il y a de désolant, c'est de penser que, même réussi dans la perfection, cela [Madame Bovary] ne peut être que passable et ne sera jamais beau, à cause du fond même.*" Withal, like so many important nineteenth-century artists, he hates his period; he sees its problems and the coming crises with great clarity; he sees the inner anarchy, the "*manque de base théologique,*" the beginning menace of the herd, the lazy eclectic Historicism, the domination of phrases; but he sees no solution and no issue; his fanatical mysticism of art is almost like a substitute religion, to which he clings convulsively, and his candor very often becomes sullen, petty, choleric and neurotic. But often this perturbs his impartiality and that love of his subjects which is comparable to the Creator's love. The paragraph which we have analyzed, however, is untouched by such deficiencies and weaknesses in his nature; it permits us to observe the working of his artistic purpose in its purity.

The scene shows man and wife at table, the most everyday situation imaginable. Before Flaubert, it would have been conceivable as literature only as part of a comic tale, an idyl, or a satire. Here it is a picture of discomfort, and not a momentary and passing one, but a chronic discomfort, which completely rules an entire life, Emma Bovary's. To be sure, various things come later, among them love

episodes—but no one could see the scene at table as part of the exposition for a love episode, just as no one would call *Madame Bovary* a love story in general. The novel is the representation of an entire human existence which has no issue; and our passage is a part of it, which, however, contains the whole. Nothing particular happens in the scene, nothing particular has happened just before it. It is a random moment from the regularly recurring hours at which the man and wife eat together. They are not quarreling, there is no sort of tangible conflict. Emma is in complete despair, but her despair is not occasioned by any definite catastrophe; there is nothing purely concrete that she has lost or for which she wished. Certainly she has many wishes, but they are entirely vague—elegance, love, a varied life; there must always have been such unconcrete despair, but no one ever thought of taking it seriously in literary works before; such formless tragedy, if it may be called tragedy, which is set in motion by the general situation itself, was first made conceivable as literature by Romanticism; probably Flaubert was the first to have represented it in people of slight intellectual culture and fairly low social station; certainly he is the first who directly captures the chronic character of this psychological situation. Nothing happens, but that nothing has become a heavy, oppressive, threatening something. How he accomplishes this we have already seen: he organizes into compact and unequivocal discourse the confused impressions of discomfort which arise in Emma at sight of the room, the meal, her husband. Elsewhere too he seldom narrates events which carry the action quickly forward; in a series of pure pictures—pictures transforming the nothingness of listless and uniform days into an oppressive condition of repugnance, boredom, false hopes, paralyzing disappointments, and piteous fears—a gray and random human destiny moves toward its end.

The interpretation of the situation is contained in its description. The two are sitting at table together; the husband divines nothing of his wife's inner state; they have so little communion that things never even come to a quarrel, an argument, an open conflict. Each of them is so immersed in his own world—she in despair and vague wish-dreams, he in his stupid philistine self-complacency—that they are both entirely alone; they have nothing in common, and yet they have nothing of their own, for the sake of which it would be

worthwhile to be alone. For privately each of them has an idiotic false world, which cannot be reconciled with the reality of his situation, and so they both miss the possibilities life offers them. What is true of these two, applies to almost all the other characters in the novel; each of the many mediocre people who act in it has his own world of mediocre and silly stupidity, a world of illusions, habits, instincts, and slogans; each is alone, none can understand another, or help another to insight; there is no common world of men, because it could only come into existence if many should find their way to their own proper reality, the reality which is given to the individual—which then would be also the true common reality. Though men come together for business and pleasure, their coming together has no note of united activity; it becomes one-sided, ridiculous, painful and it is charged with misunderstanding, vanity, futility, falsehood, and stupid hatred. But what the world would really be, the world of the “intelligent,” Flaubert never tells us; in his book the world consists of pure stupidity, which completely misses true reality, so that the latter should properly not be discoverable in it at all; yet it is there; it is in the writer’s language, which unmasks the stupidity by pure statement; language, then, has criteria for stupidity and thus also has a part in that reality of the “intelligent” which otherwise never appears in the book.

Emma Bovary, too, the principal personage of the novel, is completely submerged in that false reality, in “*la bêtise humaine*,” as is the “hero” of Flaubert’s other realistic novel, Frédéric Moreau in the *Education sentimentale*. How does Flaubert’s manner of representing such personages fit into the traditional categories “tragic” and “comic”? Certainly Emma’s existence is apprehended to its depths, certainly the earlier intermediate categories, such as the “sentimental” or the “satiric” or the “didactic,” are inapplicable, and very often the reader is moved by her fate in a way that appears very like tragic pity. But a real tragic heroine she is not. The way in which language here lays bare the silliness, immaturity, and disorder of her life, the very wretchedness of that life, in which she remains immersed (“*toute l’amertume de l’existence lui semblait servie sur son assiette*”), excludes the idea of true tragedy, and the author and the reader can never feel as at one with her as must be the case with the tragic hero; she is always being tried, judged, and, together with the entire world in which she is caught, condemned. But neither is

she comic; surely not; for that, she is understood far too deeply from within her fateful entanglement: though Flaubert never practices any "psychological understanding" but simply lets the state of the facts speak for itself. He has found an attitude toward the reality of contemporary life which is entirely different from earlier attitudes and stylistic levels, including—and especially—Balzac's and Stendhal's. It could be called, quite simply, "objective seriousness." This sounds strange as a designation of the style of a literary work. Objective seriousness, which seems to penetrate to the depths of the passions and entanglements of a human life, but without itself becoming moved, or at least without betraying that it is moved—this is an attitude which one would expect from a priest, a teacher, or a psychologist rather than from an artist. But priest, teacher, and psychologist wish to accomplish something direct and practical—which is far from Flaubert's mind. He wishes, by his attitude—"pas de cris, pas de convulsion, rien que la fixité d'un regard pensif"—to force language to render the truth concerning the subjects of his observation: "*le style étant à lui tout seul une manière absolue de voir les choses*" (Corr. II, 346). Yet this leads in the end to a didactic purpose: criticism of the contemporary world; and we must not hesitate to say so, much as Flaubert may insist that he is an artist and nothing but an artist. The more one studies Flaubert, the clearer it becomes how much insight into the problematic nature and the hollowness of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture is contained in his realistic works; and many important passages from his letters confirm this. The demonification of everyday social intercourse which is to be found in Balzac is certainly entirely lacking in Flaubert: life no longer surges and foams, it flows viscously and sluggishly. The essence of the happenings of ordinary contemporary life seemed to Flaubert to consist not in tempestuous actions and passions, not in demonic men and forces, but in the prolonged chronic state whose surface movement is mere empty bustle, while underneath it there is another movement, almost imperceptible but universal and unceasing, so that the political, economic, and social subsoil appears comparatively stable and at the same time intolerably charged with tension. Events seemed to him hardly to change; but in the concretion of duration, which Flaubert is able to suggest both in the individual occurrence (as in our example) and in his total picture of the times,

there appears something like a concealed threat: the period is charged with its stupid issuelessness as with an explosive.

Through his level of style, a systematic and objective seriousness, from which things themselves speak and, according to their value, classify themselves before the reader as tragic or comic, or in most cases quite unobtrusively as both, Flaubert overcame the Romantic vehemence and uncertainty in the treatment of contemporary subjects; there is clearly something of the earlier Positivism in his idea of art, although he sometimes speaks very derogatorily of Comte. On the basis of this objectivity, further developments became possible, with which we shall deal in later chapters. However, few of his successors conceived the task of representing contemporary reality with the same clarity and responsibility as he; though among them there were certainly freer, more spontaneous, and more richly endowed minds than his.

The serious treatment of everyday reality, the rise of more extensive and socially inferior human groups to the position of subject matter for problematic-existential representation on the one hand—the placing of any ordinary persons and events whatsoever in the general course of contemporary history, the kinetic historical background on the other—these, we believe, are the foundations of modern realism, and it is natural that the broad and elastic form of the prose romance should increasingly impose itself for a rendering comprising so many elements. If our view is correct then throughout the nineteenth century France played the most important part in the rise and development of modern realism. In England, though the development was basically the same as in France, it came about more quietly and more gradually, without the sharp break between 1780 and 1830; it began much earlier and carried on traditional forms and viewpoints much longer, until far into the Victorian period. Fielding's art (*Tom Jones* appeared in 1749) already shows a far more energetic contemporary realism of life in all its departments than do the French novels of the same period; even the kinetics of the contemporary historical background are not entirely lacking; but the whole is conceived more moralistically and sheers away from any problematic and existential seriousness; on the other hand, even in Dickens, whose work began to appear in the thirties of the nineteenth century, there is, despite the strong social feeling and sug-

gestive density of his "milieux," almost no trace of the kinetics of the political and historical background. Meanwhile Thackeray, who places the events of *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) most concretely in contemporary history (the years before and after Waterloo), on the whole preserves the moralistic, half-satirical, half-sympathetic viewpoint very much as it was handed down by the eighteenth century. We must unfortunately forego discussing the rise of modern Russian realism (Gogol's *Dead Souls* appeared in 1842, his short story "The Cloak" as early as 1835) even in the most general way; for our purpose, this is impossible when one cannot read the works in their original language. We shall have to content ourselves with discussing later the influence exercised by this school.

(Translated by Willard R. Trask)

Elizabeth Hardwick

A FLORENTINE CONFERENCE

The guests were leaving and the house was cold. It was near midnight. Outside Florence was quiet, pale yellow with damp, shining streets, an immense barracks of tall, dusty-shuttered houses, calm and solemn with privacy. An old horse stumbled over the cobles, jerking behind him a frozen driver and an empty black and green carriage of remarkable endurance.

"Make no mistake they can take over in twenty-four hours, don't fool yourself," Miss Major said, pulling on her wool-lined gloves and addressing the room with glowing, pink-checked anxiety and oracular brevity.

"They?" Marchese Ferrero said. This young man had not been following Miss Major, but had instead been discussing the departure for America of another young Italian whose name was of such antique beginnings and miraculous survival in the indescribable splendor of Florentine snobbery that merely to utter it was a cultural act, like a recitation from Tasso. "What can Nicky do there, I wonder? I wonder very much. . . . He likes fishing and hunting and is charming, charming, but still you know . . . America. . . ." The Marchese spoke English with an excellent Oxford accent and from time to time his nose lifted timidly into the air, as if it were flying south for a holiday.

In Italian someone said, "Igor Cassini did quite well there. . . . And the old Italian in California, with the bank, you know. . . . Perhaps they can. . . Nicky is adored by everyone. . . ."

"Cassini, yes, many connections, but still. . . And the old man in California is dead, isn't he, and no one seems to know *him* anyway. . . ."

"Fiorello La Guardia!" another voice added and the Italians laughed. "Fiorello!"

"In twenty-four hours and any time they want to . . . from within, I mean. . ." Miss Major repeated thoughtfully.

"*They?* Oh yes, the Communists. . . Of course. . . In twenty-four hours, you know so? Not even a few days, eh?" The Marchese suddenly turned quite red with humiliation. His fine eyes blinked sadly and he looked shyly, cautiously, about the room, as if to say, "Dear friends, you are mad with me, perhaps? No. . . No, really? Many thanks, please!"

An American who made propaganda films for the American government, a sharp-chinned man with a faded, clever face and a faded brown mustache, glared at the empty white and gold coffee cups with a fury somewhat bored by its own violence. This photographer felt deeply the stab of professional insult common to people who have lived in a foreign country for a few years and *still* find their opinions not asked for at home. His little face, all of it, all at once, frowned with injury. "Our policy is hopeless! De Gasperi's hands are tied because he needs the financial support of the land-owners and when you depend upon that support you aren't likely to set about land reform with any great speed—"

"Ah, yes, slow and modest . . . but a very good man, a good, honest fellow, I understand, De Gasperi?" the Marchese said vaguely.

"*We* ought to back De Gasperi with some of the money we're pouring into the wrong places, back him and tell him to go ahead with the reforms." The photographer's eyes now menaced the heavy silver ornaments on the desk before him. He sighed and shrugged, bone weary with his government, that fractious wife driving him to divorce.

"But have we the right . . . the right?" an old American expatriate wondered, a large, wrinkled woman in a worn, spotted fur coat from some animal strange to modern eyes. "It's easy to say come in and divide up a bit of land here and there, yes . . . but is it? Can we, just like that? It's not our country and the interference—"

"My dear goose," the photographer said icily in that awful tone of passionate domestic quarrel, raw with the ultimate provocation, "it isn't as if millions of dollars to the Fiat Company weren't interference!"

The fire was almost out. A hoarse-voiced Italian with magnificent wavy hair, tough, durable and fierce as cactus, said to the photographer's sister who had just arrived for her first visit to Italy, "Are there any interesting writers in Italy! Horrors, what a question! Bah! Does a dead man write? . . . We're just a few old rattling

bones. . . . The future, ugh! It's America's turn now. . . . It's all yours. . . . I give it to you! Bah!"

The girl blushed with genuine modesty, a virgin shrinking from the bad taste of an overwhelming offer. "No, really, I don't think you should say that! . . . It's lovely here. . . . Honestly!"

Marchese Ferrero attempted lightness. "We may revive some day. . . . Look at China!"

"Twenty-four hours. They've incredible discipline," Miss Major went on. "It's something to watch, right here even. The Mayor of Florence was trained in Moscow, you see. . . . You see?"

"Oh, Madge!" the old expatriate lady said. "Don't laugh at me. . . . I'm as sentimental as a dove, yes, but Florence! The Duomo, the Uffizi, Donatello and the rest, Santa Croce . . . the Medici, things like that! In Moscow you say, dear . . . Extraordinary. The Mayor of Florence!" She coughed and pondered bleakly, stiff with a half-century of Italian winters. This gentle Florentine relic had only a modest stipend, just enough to see her through years and years in the arctic chambers of the Biblioteca Nazionale and the library of the British Institute. There she was "working" on her favorites among the great Italian women—Bianca Capello, Vittoria Colonna and Isabella D'Este—and with terrible patience digging away at these figures' awesome heroism, down, down to the pure ore, which this old scholar, rheum-eyed with labor, saw in the dim shape of her own fatigued fortitude and stubborn competence. These diggings and strikes brought the battered American lady all the consolations of religion and philosophy.

"Mmm . . . " the photographer said indifferently, shuddering at the obsolescence of his compatriot who had now turned her book-weary face to him, as if for protection.

An old servant, an immense woolen creature, a sort of quarter-master corps on two legs, padded and stuffed with underwear and mysterious layers from head to toe, bowed them out. When they had gone, she sleepily peered through the shutters and looked down at the wind disturbing the muddy flow of the Arno. In the moonlight, the derricks and tanks, rebuilding the Ponte alla Carraia which had been blown up by the Germans in 1944, shone like silver. Muttering her evening complaints and prayers the servant went off to bed, pulled a mountain of covers, old sheets and stuffings up to her neck and, turning now on her side, fell into a blessed, illiterate sleep.

Robert Warshow

AN OLD MAN GONE

*I must confess we come not to be kings:
That's not our fault.*

—THE JEW OF MALTA

In a will made some years before he died, my father directed that his body was to be cremated and that there was to be no religious ceremonial of any kind at his funeral. A later will, drawn up during his final illness, did not mention these points; I suppose the imminent possibility of death may have made him reluctant to go into details. (It was said later that he “must have known” he was dying; it is true that he made no direct reference to death during the fifteen months of his illness, except once at the very beginning and again a few hours before he died.) In any case, it was readily decided to carry out the instructions of the earlier will in this respect. Any other course would have been the grossest absurdity, and no other course was suggested or, I would guess, even thought of. He had expressed a point of view that we all shared.

It is interesting that the will made no provision about the disposition of his ashes, often the one point on which the freethinker allows himself to betray something approaching a religious sentiment. Once or twice when my father had talked about his wish to be cremated—he talked about it rather often, indeed, with heavy and, to me, disturbing humor—I had asked him, in much the same tone, what was to be done with his ashes. He didn’t care, he said—do anything, throw them into an ash can. When at last the problem really came up, I suggested that the ashes might be buried under a tree at the summer hotel he had built in the Catskills. This idea was greeted favorably (my mother recalled that she had “always told him,” as he continued to invest money in that unprofitable enterprise, that he was building a mausoleum for himself), and I was secretly pleased when someone else in the family proposed that we might even put some kind of plaque on the tree. As it turned out, however, one

of my sisters—of all his children, the one most disastrously unsuccessful in her relations with him—decided that she wanted the ashes, and they are buried now under a tree in her back yard on Long Island.

Since my father died in Florida—a final assertion of will had brought him to that health-giving climate, where he died within twelve hours—an uncompromising respect for common sense would have suggested that he be cremated there; and there was some sentiment for this plan, which would have avoided a great deal of trouble and expense. But various considerations, not all of them “pure,” led to the decision that his body should be shipped to New York. I was very glad of this, because I found myself anxious to see the body: primarily, perhaps, to convince myself that he was really dead. As soon as the undertaker informed us that the body was “ready”—it was by then three days after his death—I went to see.

What could I have expected? So far as any evidence could go, it was convincing enough. He was dead as a doornail—the crudity of this phrase served some purpose for me at the time, though it repels me now. The flesh of his face had shrunk, drawing the lips tight and thin in an upward curve only abstractly (which is to say, not at all) suggestive of a smile, as if he had had his face “lifted”; his nose, now bony and lean, revealed a sharp curve that had not been visible when he was alive; only the heavy gray hands were as they had been. Above all, there was that appearance of perfect grooming which is never to be found except on a corpse: the face shaved cruelly clean and carefully powdered, the few strands of gray hair motionlessly neat, the necktie (a surprisingly bright one) once and for all in place. I restrained a desire to touch the face, because I was not alone and even more because of an obscure fear that my hand might leave a mark on the dead flesh, which I thought of as being malleable.

It is a fact not surprising, perhaps, but worth remark, that no one looks out of place in a coffin; somehow the coffin itself, with its appearance of functional economy, its undisguisable appropriateness, is chiefly responsible for this. Barring the grosser accidents, and with the discreet support of the undertaker, we shall all make a good showing for a day or so after we are dead. I happened once to see a man dead whom I had never seen alive, and yet he filled his coffin completely; though he did not know it, he was still in the

last stage of his existence, and if I was to see him at all, this was possibly as good a time as any. My father too, though he was my father, took his place among the dead with a kind of authority, as if, in a sense, it belonged to him—as surely in a sense it did. In the course of his long illness, I had often enough thought of him dead, but my fantasy, when it did not entirely skip over the event itself, had always placed it in a context of domestic disturbance and untidiness. I had forgotten the undertaker, who was to make him “ready.” Coming now upon his actual corpse in a bare room at the Riverside Memorial Chapel (a sign on the door said “Mr. Warshow,” as though a man and not a corpse occupied the room), I had the feeling that I was watching him again in one of his public roles, fulfilling—and with a grace that should not, after all, have surprised me (and yet I was always surprised to discover he was graceful)—some peculiarly serious function of the “adult” world. It seemed that he was my father still, and this being dead was only a new form in which he expressed his importance. When I grow up, I too will have a funeral. . . .

I felt myself thus a participant in his dignity; but that was not what I had come for, and I tried also, in underhanded ways, to destroy it—he was not safe from me yet, nor I from him. There were flowers in the room, and I wondered with real uneasiness whether the odor of the flowers did not conceal an odor of decay: how long did it take for a corpse to begin to smell? what would it smell like? This led me to speculate also about the mysteries of embalming. What, exactly, does the embalmer do? What gross indignities, greater perhaps than the indignities of illness itself, might have gone to produce this final effect of ascetic withdrawal? Since the coffin was open only at the head, I was even frivolous enough, or unsettled enough, to wonder whether the corpse was wearing trousers: what a scandal if the Riverside Memorial Chapel were found to be trafficking in dead men’s trousers! And one piece of private information seemed to assume enormous importance: the body in the coffin no longer contained a heart or lungs, these organs having been removed for laboratory examination.

The tendency of these thoughts—their “intimacy,” so much like the forbidden speculations of a child (was it not, in a way, my last

chance to “find out”?)—was distressing to me. And yet, quite apart from the fact that they were unavoidable, such reflections were not really “inappropriate,” even by the sensitive standards I was naturally inclined to apply to myself at the time. I took it that my father had said, in effect: no nonsense (probably he did not quite mean it, but I think that hardly matters), and it seemed to me there was somewhat more “nonsense” in the dignity surrounding his corpse—a dignity that even without my intervention could be maintained only so long as the embalmer’s measures, whatever they might have been, held good—than in the one indestructible fact that it *was* a corpse. If it was a question of respect for the dead (and I suppose it was, or I should not have been troubled, or not quite in this way), I was willing enough to be “respectful”; the last thing I wished was to make any gesture of unconvictionality. But I had my own rights in the matter, too; and besides, even in the simplest terms—in the terms, that is, which I should have used to defend myself if there had been anyone to accuse me—it was possible to claim that with the program the dead man had however sketchily laid down, too much “respect” might itself have been a form of “disrespect.”

In practice, of course, it is a matter of some urgency to dispose of a dead body: a funeral is not supposed to raise questions, and though the particular form it finally assumes may be the result of numerous decisions, none of them is in itself fundamental; or, more accurately, it is never possible to know whether a decision is fundamental or not, but it is always easy to make it, since every decision must in any case lead to getting rid of the body. Can one properly ask, for instance, what was involved in such an element as the decision to spend two hundred and seventy-five dollars for a coffin when it would also have been possible to spend five hundred dollars or, I suppose, one hundred? The choice of a coffin was hardly important. Still, the coffin was to contain—and then be destroyed with—the body of someone who had proposed, no matter with what reservations, that his ashes should be thrown into an ash can. Was two hundred and seventy-five dollars “nonsense”? If it was, would one hundred dollars have been that much less “nonsense”? As you see, these questions are pointless; there had to be a coffin.

If nevertheless there was a problem involved somehow in all this, it is hardly to be stated so simply. Perhaps, even, “problem” is too

formal a word. I mean only that every fact belonging to the process by which my father's body was disposed of seemed to require of me, not only that I should in the direct sense experience it, but also, and with a special force, that I should actively and conscientiously think about it, even "take a position," as if there were some definite "program" at stake that was every moment in danger of being misunderstood or compromised, though indeed this "danger" existed not quite on a public level but chiefly for me alone. I was anxious, in fact, that my father's death should not prove a disappointment, and I examined every detail for what it might have to offer. The "problem" was: what could I legitimately hope to find?

This question, at any rate, is not pointless; it is said so often, and with such obvious truth, that funerals are made to serve the living. And yet the issue always came back to the dead man himself; if the funeral was for us, it was still his funeral, all the more his for its appearance of having been created *ad hoc*; and the chief difficulty, for me, was to see some kind of "justice" done to an image of my father, part mine and part what I believed to be his own, that had not yet come clear and probably never would. I found myself offended, for instance, by the tendency of some of those around me to say that he had "passed away" when they meant he had died; this seemed not only an evasion on their part (though so accustomed a one that it could hardly have been effective), but also an injustice to my father, who, if he was often incapable of the right delicacies, was likewise incapable of the wrong. But I too, so militant (inwardly) to assert the corpse's absolute deadness, was to say later, with all suitable nodding of the head, that my father "would have been pleased" with his funeral—what an absurdity! My father himself, though he believed in the reality of death, put an extra clause in his will asking in effect that his children should think well of him and approve of his dispositions, and even suggesting that he loved them all equally, which was not true: the truth was only that he wanted them all to love him equally. And there were times during his illness when he became a child and allowed himself to be soothed like a child.

Indeed, I have already misrepresented him: he had not really said "no nonsense"—that was my invention to give his funeral "character." At most he had said that death changes a man into a

corpse and there is no God; on the subject of death, this was as far as his commitment extended. I do not mean that it is necessarily possible to go further, but given the completeness of the statement, it was the tone that mattered: conceivably, he might actually have instructed us to throw his ashes into an ash can, and that, without altering the sense of his statement, would yet obviously have made an enormous difference. But he was not trying to be original, nor even, in fact, to make a "statement" at all; he had too much humor and was too sociable a man to place an exaggerated value on his "philosophy." The instructions contained in his will simply expressed his sense of what was fitting; after all, he was trying to fulfill certain conventions.

In its proper historical context, the complex of ideas on which these conventions rested had indeed constituted all that one could wish of a "philosophy," sufficient to engage fully those who embraced it and requiring of them some degree of honesty and even, at times, of courage. My father was born in 1876 in Russia, into that enlightenment which came so late but with such blinding clarity to the Jews of Eastern Europe; from the very little I ever heard him say about his early years, I suppose he was a materialist and a rationalist before he was sixteen, and apparently without the intense struggle which the adoption of this position involved for so many of his contemporaries. In America he was as a matter of course a Socialist, and took some active part in the vicissitudes of that movement for about fifty years; shortly before his death he was involved in an abortive effort to reunite its remaining fragments. He belonged to the Socialist movement as one belongs to a certain city or a certain neighborhood: it gave him his friends and it embodied his culture—so fully, indeed, that he had little need for the more formal objects of culture, such as books, but was able to expend his considerable excess of intellectual energy in the public atmosphere of meetings and discussions, in the masculine (and indefinably "Jewish") rituals of card-playing, and in a peculiarly serious concern with the daily newspaper, which seemed always to yield more to his reading than it has ever done to mine. Even when he was young he could hardly have been anything like what we should call an "intellectual" (though in some sense he surely belonged to the "intelligentsia"),

and he suffered from a sense of cultural inferiority that expressed itself sometimes as unnecessary humility and sometimes as gross philistinism; but it was always apparent that he had once lived receptively in a climate of ideas, and he continued to use his mind independently and to good effect in the areas that interested him, mainly business and politics.

In neither of these two fields of activity was he pre-eminently successful, but he enjoyed a relatively high status in both and had some of the expected rewards: an apartment on Central Park West (though in one of the less fashionable buildings), a small "country place," a month or so in Florida in the winter, posts of honor on various committees connected with the paper industry and the Socialist movement, a couple of testimonial dinners; before the end there was even a mink coat for my mother and made-to-order suits for him—this last, it seemed to me, a cultural accretion never quite assimilated. He was entitled to think of himself, if he chose, as a "success" rather than a "failure." (The *New York Times* printed his picture when he died: again a thing that "would have pleased" him, and also, as I found, important to me.) In business especially, he was conscious of having a personal weight disproportionate to the actual scale of his operations, and he took a particular though somewhat wry pride in the friendship of certain Gentile members of his industry, who for their part seemed to regard him with amused affection and a kind of astonishment, and were sometimes willing to grant him extraordinary favors in business merely because of the outrageous vehemence with which he demanded them. Indeed, to make demands was the largest part of his *modus operandi*: he affected to expose his needs with the directness and violence of a child, and insisted that they be satisfied. Since he was not a child, and since he was clever and had an acute though limited histrionic sense, this passed even with him as a form of wit; one hardly dared to imagine how much he might be in earnest. At his most outrageous, he was capable of jocularly accusing a paper-mill executive of anti-Semitism for refusing to grant him a special and entirely unwarranted reduction in price; by some trick of personality he could just save such jokes from complete vulgarity, and those schooled in a more conventional if perhaps no more polite tradition of humor often found it impossible to resist him—I sometimes

thought they might even have been learning from him a quality of relaxation that he himself assuredly did not possess.

In the Socialist movement, where his rather heavy type of charm was more familiar, and the issues were after all more important, his personality necessarily took on a greater complexity. I was too young to know anything directly of his more active years; for me, "the movement" stretched back into a limitless past which, though it had in concrete ways continued into the present, was in its essence as remote from me as for instance my father's first marriage. In that past he had talked on the street corners to the unresponding masses, for whom he nevertheless retained a tender solicitude, and he had met "historical" figures like Emma Goldman and Trotsky and Debs. When I grew of an age to be a Socialist myself and asked him about these heroic progenitors, his answer expressed an easy detachment that eventually came to seem typical of his relation to the world of radicalism. He saw Emma Goldman as a "crazy" and "loose" Bohemian; Trotsky he remembered as a brilliant and egotistical man entirely incapable of respecting the opinions of others; and his great admiration of Debs was mingled with a familiar contempt because Debs had been a drunkard—in this there was surely some Jewish feeling about the "weaker" moral fiber of the *goyim*.

Toward himself also, in some contexts, he was capable of a similar detachment. My own image of politics was strongly affected by his refusal to take himself seriously as a candidate for public office; once, when he was running for Congress, he went so far as to deny his candidacy, explaining to a Republican business acquaintance that the name on the ballot belonged to "some crazy cousin of mine"—essentially, I think, this was an act not of cowardice but of mere good nature. Indeed, a certain tone of irony seems to have been characteristic of the Socialist movement as a whole; few of its adherents regarded it with absolute seriousness, and many of its peculiar virtues had their source in the expectation of failure. When my father took me to shake hands with Norman Thomas (I imagine it was in 1928, when I was eleven), my excitement at the meeting was already tempered with an appreciation of the absurdity—though an "honorable" absurdity—of Thomas' endless running for office.

Sometimes, falling naturally into the rhetoric of Socialism, my

father found it possible to speak of himself as an "idealist" (it was a term of the highest praise: Debs had been an "idealist") who had devoted his life to the struggle for a better world and lived to taste the riper wisdom of disillusion. Here again, a saving element of irony partially retracted the statement, which was true only in its broadest outlines. But the note of pathos was real: like many energetic and willful men, he was extraordinarily conscious of the recalcitrance of the external world, which he was driven to be always nervously seeking to overcome, and he thought of life as a series of inevitable compromises and defeats. In his political thinking, this brought him perhaps too readily to the side of realism, but it largely protected him from that demoralizing pseudo-realism which consists of trying to play the game of power without the necessary strength, and which has been the special affliction of radical politics. On the private level, the mood of pessimism was the closest he ever came to passivity and contemplation, and it did more than anything else to soften the harsh outlines of his personality; it was perhaps the chief source of his personal dignity and charm, of his erratic and sometimes oppressive generosity, and also, ultimately, of his humor, which even at its most graceless seemed to express obscurely an acceptance of the human condition, as if his aggressions came out of some higher resignation that had taught him the uselessness of all ceremony. For me, when I felt myself laboring under the immeasurable weight of my father's presence, his pessimism became, oddly, a source of hope: perhaps, after all, my failure was only part of the general failure, and might be forgiven. For my own sake, I tried often to make pessimism the central fact of his character (as I have been doing here), and sometimes it became for me the very image of maturity; eventually, it was one of the elements that made him look "natural" in his coffin.

There is no doubt that he wanted more than he got. But how much more, and more of what? Nothing he might have said in answer could have been trusted, and perhaps nothing I can say either: the more I write, the more absurd seems this effort to be "truthful." He concealed himself behind a screen of restless, purposeful industry which did indeed bear fruit; but the sum of his activity in its very clarity never seemed to answer to the great unclear, unspoken de-

mand which hung upon him like some faintly disturbing bodily effusion, always present but forcing itself upon one's attention only fitfully and indirectly, in brief explosions of rage and sudden acts of ruthlessness, or in the more prolonged tensions of silent emotional pressure, or even in the unpredictable impulses of his generosity. He asked everything and nothing; what he asked was never just what he wanted, and he knew it, even if he did not know what he wanted. Money itself was almost too specific an object; though he was an imaginative businessman and apparently enjoyed the processes that brought him money, he made expensive mistakes and seemed to lack that final dedication which might have made him rich; money was not really interesting enough. Once he showed me some lines of poetry which he said—and doubtless believed—he had written when he was young; the lines were in fact very characteristic of him, expressing a generalized melancholy over the passage of time, but I came upon them later in the works of some nineteenth-century poet—Robert Southey, I think—and drew back in alarm at this glimpse of my father's inner confusion. What did he *not* want? Perhaps his demands were at bottom so enormous that he did not dare to define them. Or perhaps to the immigrant generation there seemed no real need of definition: simply to have come was their supreme act of definition: America was the land of opportunity-in-general. *Doubtless I make too much of this; like everyone else, I suppose, my father wanted to be rich and powerful and wise and beloved, and was not lucky or talented enough. Must I recreate his fantasies? But I don't know what fantasies he might have permitted himself. He was most of the time a very reasonable man, quick to compromise.*

In his personal life, too, it was impossible to know what he wanted—what, even, he would have been willing to receive—and yet quite clear that he had not got it. He had two wives and four children and two stepchildren, and we all belonged in varying degrees and each in his own way to that general disappointment which constituted, not perhaps the real content of my father's life but somehow its contrived form, the thing he was impelled to make of his experience. To my ear, at least, it seemed that he spoke of his children sometimes as if they were only elements of his fate, and his very affection had sometimes the tone of resignation; the rough gesture with which

he tried to draw others to him was most often, in its deepest meaning, a gesture of attempted reconciliation: let us agree to forgive each other. The guilt of his own need meeting the guilt of the yielding unyielding world: this was his contact with those who stood near him. It was the closest possible contact and it was no contact at all. Like many Jews of his generation, he had an intense family feeling that operated with all the force of the particular and yet was fundamentally generalized and abstract; a family was necessary—I cannot imagine him not surrounded by dependents—but his relation to the family had little to do with the specific qualities of the individuals who belonged to it. He was happiest, I think, with the small children—his own first, and then his grandchildren—whom he could treat as undifferentiated objects of feeling, and who had not yet failed him. In the end, the family was only one more area for the rigidly patterned operations of his personality; it satisfied his need to have others around him, but this compulsive sociability concealed a fundamental unwillingness to endure the tensions of real intimacy.

He had read the speeches of Robert Ingersoll, and perhaps heard some of them delivered, and he tried a number of times to make me see how important it was that Ingersoll had challenged God to strike him dead. (I think now that he was right: it was important.) In the course of time he changed his mind about many things, but it could never have occurred to him to question the truth of atheism: religion was the aberration of those who were unwilling to face the facts. (I owe it to my father that I myself have had little “meaningful” contact with religion.) Nor would he have been prepared to understand that quasi-religious “re-evaluation” of the liberal tradition which has occupied a number of intelligent men in recent years. He did not need to be told that life is difficult and men are imperfect; his error, if he was in error, was the opposite one: he lacked presumption.

I have said more than I intended and perhaps more than is necessary. Throw the ashes into an ash can: the idea was half brutality and half self-pity.

Several hundred people came to the funeral. I used them, as I had used the picture in the *Times*, to justify my own uncertain and somewhat shamefaced sense of my father's importance. I experienced,

indeed, the warmest feelings toward all these people who had in one way or another participated in my father's existence, and I thought of them confusedly as possessing some special moral competence that after all could not fail to make the funeral a "success," *whatever that might in the end turn out to mean; they became, for a short time, a kind of composite image of my father himself.*

The corpse lay now at the front of a large hall, greatly diminished by its surroundings. Dignity still clung to it, but a dignity already a little questionable (was the necktie perhaps too bright?), no longer self-sufficient, like the dignity which surrounds those who submit quietly to humiliation; the corpse's existence was contained now in the eyes of those who had come to see it.

At the proper moment, instructed by one of the functionaries of the undertaking establishment, my brother and I escorted my mother past the open coffin, pausing for a few seconds to look at the corpse. When we reached our seats, the coffin had been closed. After it is closed, the coffin is no longer "appropriate" but obviously too small. It is even possible that the lid might press upon the nose of the corpse, but this does not matter.

Two friends of my father—one Socialist, one businessman—made short speeches of no particular distinction but also, it seemed to me, with a minimum of dishonesty. Then the crowd dispersed and we drove out past miles of cemeteries to the crematorium, where we sat in a shabby chapel while someone played vaguely religious music on a tiny organ; the music was offensive, but it did not seem worthwhile to make an issue of it: on the whole, the "program" had been carried out. After some papers had been signed, the coffin, with one wreath of flowers lying untidily on top of it, was pushed into an opening in a wall, and the door was closed on it. We all sat expectantly until someone came to tell us that was all.

Albert Cook

SESTINA II

How did our heart admit the spreading fear
That undermined our peace and love for home?
Soldiers in crises save their lives by fear
To down it after battle, but our fear
Battening on shadows, grows and grows with time.
It gives us no relief to garden fear
Or plot its painful vectors; still we fear
To fail in situations where we find
Contingencies the sound refuse to find
Who face a stream of facts immune to fear.
Brave imminent disgrace or run away
Seems the bleak choice, that blights us either way.

We can recover peace no other way
Than quelling where it rose the source of fear
That seeped into our will and washed away
The trail preserving, if we lagged, a way
Back to the blessings of a bounded home.
Stinging God's wounds, we scorned the rocky way
Up giddy peaks and shunned the broad high way
Where flocks bewildered riot killing time.
Our pride impelled us to consume our time
Exploring a thick, unfrequented way
Where one who held out long enough might find
A substitute for love, that all can find.

We spend, brands in the dark, who burn to find
An Eden God resigned to drift away
When Adam acquiesced to bite and find
How God knows bliss, but made his offspring find
Poisoned the fountainhead of will. We fear

Our wraith in a wavering firetongue wrapped to find
Like that suave Ithacan who sailed to find
The blessed isles, abandoning wife and home.
Though we recoil when we remember home,
The taste is ashes of all else we find
When, leaping like deer through snowy fields of time,
We flee submission that can conquer time.

To swim the years we woke when yellowing time
Engulfed our childhood meadows. Now we find
Our mouth as mute as fish to tell how time
Keeps channeling our rush through fresher time,
New hulks and weeds and pearls along our way.
Eden's loss entails that man know time
As shoreless gloom and not envision time
Till it has flowed behind and fled his fear.
Summed past could not suffice to still our fear,
Falling always short of actual place and time.
As salmon teem with spawn our ache for home
Must make us leap the future's rapids home.

If we could sense our course as pigeons home
Or athletes gain the atmosphere of time
Beyond clocks' hebetude, would our old home
Warm our horizon, allow us to feel at home
And leave us whole without desire to find
A hall of flame-flawed mirrors for a home?
All angels call the heart of sunlight home
But those who willed to reign and fell away,
Whose smoky visages occlude our way
When love would bless our will to live at home,
To chance the bonds and trespasses we fear
Before our life becomes the dross of fear.

No matter where we stray, the mists of fear
Enshroud our heart and complicate our way.
Though we know at our hearthfire we can find
No fill of peace while flesh adjusts to time,
The voyage wanes and time has haled us home.

Sandra Wool

TO A YOUNGER SISTER ENGAGED

With no lady terms is my heart loaden
This furibund organ, fubb'd and baffl'd,
Would bellow a grace to your egg and butter meal
This day has brought thee
Leachery without the antipast of iniquity

(O who is to say what this day has brought thee
Has Cassandra measured the entrails on her confounded wheel)

The pasht heart is prophetical and I would give thee joy
Angelical
For I remember you and our embrace before my memory began
But seared, I am fleering
Racked, I contain no glory
The world is a venomous caustic torbillous fen
I offer a murdering and epilogenous wail

“As I stood by to fill my pitcher
And clutched the rose you'd sent me in my hand
I thought I heard the song of a succubus
Imploring me to lend her my partner for a dance”

Emma Swan

CIRCE'S SONG

Where is it, what you seek?
Outside, behind the door,
Over a mountain peak?
What are you waiting for?

Here is my heart, it beats
More lovingly than a clock
(I search about for feats
To astound the unmoved rock).

The Sailors root in the sty,
Transformed from man to beast,
While you at the table sigh,
And will not touch the feast.

As you sit dejected there,
With gaze so far removed,
I wonder I should care
To think I am reprov'd.

Yet if the moment's granted,
I am a goddess still,
And you are disenchanted,
Odysseus, speak your will.

ART CHRONICLE

CEZANNE AND THE UNITY OF MODERN ART

The number and discord of the tendencies that constitute modern art are taken for a symptom of decadence. The species as it declines proliferates in gratuitous mutations. There is a bit of truth in this impression but it derives mainly from the fact that since Chirico academicism has been able to regain credit in new, avant-garde versions of itself like Surrealism, Neue Sachlichkeit, Neo-Romanticism, Magic Realism—even Social Realism. When these manifestations are put aside—consigned to the outer darkness of academicism in general, where they really belong—the scene becomes more orderly. Yet not completely so: four or five different tendencies still seem to move in conflict within genuinely contemporary painting and sculpture. The reason for their discord, far from having to do with decadence, lies, however, in the very vitality of modern art.

The apostles of the modern movement, from Manet on, did not, contrary to advanced opinion—which often gallops through the history of art faster than art itself—always finish what they began. The Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, Rodin, even Turner, Redon, Monticelli, even Courbet and Daumier, left behind many loose threads the tying up of which has provided later artists with tasks whose performance asks more than unadventurous repetition. Bonnard and Vuillard did not merely imitate or execute variations on Impressionism: by extending, they completed it. There was enough left over from what Rodin had planted to ripen anew in Maillol, Lehmbruck, Despiau, Kolbe, Lachaise, and others. Matisse did more than add to Gauguin's beginnings: he fulfilled all in the older master that had been premature, clarifying and enlarging his new vision, and rendering it less self-conscious. In their several and smaller ways Derain, Vlaminck, and Segonzac filled in what Cézanne, Manet, and Courbet had outlined, while the Expressionists have not yet finished defining those things that Van Gogh adumbrated; nor have they exhausted all the hints to be found in Cézanne's early manner.

That so much of the advanced painting of the first third of this century is a knitting up of threads spun in the latter half of the nine-

teenth century explains its diversity as different from eclecticism; its multifarious tendencies have too common a root and supplement each other too well. These are the different directions in which insights released by one and the same revolution deploy to establish a new order, not anarchy. Their variety radiates from a common center and is the product of purposeful energy, not of dissipation. The future will see this better than we. . . .

Cézanne, as is generally enough recognized, is the most copious source of what we know as modern art, the most abundant generator of ideas and the most enduring in newness. The modernity of his art, its very stylishness—more than a retroactive effect—continues. There remains something indescribably racy and sudden—racier than Dufy, as sudden as Picasso or Matisse—in the way his crisp blue line separates the contour of an apple from its mass. Yet how distrustful he was of bravura, speed—all the attributes that go with stylishness. And how unsure down at bottom about where he was going.

On the verge of middle age Cézanne had the crucial revelation of his artist's mission; yet what he thought was revealed was in good part inconsistent with the means he was already developing under the impact of the revelation. The problematic quality of his art—the source, perhaps, of its unfading modernity—and of which he himself was aware, came from the ultimate necessity of revising his intentions under the pressure of a style that evolved as if in opposition to his conscious aims. *He was making the first—and last—pondered effort to save the intrinsic principle of the Western tradition of painting: its concern with an ample and literal rendition of the illusion of the third dimension.* He had noted the Impressionists' inadvertent silting up of pictorial depth. And it is because he tried so hard to re-excavate that depth without abandoning Impressionist color, and because his attempt, while vain, was so profoundly conceived, that his work became the discovery and turning point it did. Completing Manet's involuntary break with Renaissance tradition, he fell upon a new principle of painting that carried further into the future. Like Manet and with almost as little appetite as he for the role of revolutionary, he changed the course of art out of the very effort to return it by new paths to its old ways.

Cézanne would seem to have accepted his notion of pictorial unity, of the realized, final effect of the picture, from the old masters. When he said that he wished to re-do Poussin after nature and "make Impressionism something solid and durable like the old masters," he meant apparently that he wanted a composition and design like that of the High Renaissance painters to be imposed on the "raw" chromatic material

supplied by the Impressionist notation of visual experience. The parts, the atom units, were to be done as much as possible by the Impressionist method, held to be truer to nature, but put together into a whole according to traditional principles. The Impressionists, as consistent in their logic as they knew how to be, had permitted nature to dictate the unity of the picture along with its parts, refusing in theory to interfere consciously with their optical impressions. For all that, their pictures did not lack structure, as is so often claimed; in so far as any one of them was successful it achieved an appropriate and satisfying unity, as must any successful work of art. (The overestimation by Roger Fry and others of Cézanne's success in doing exactly what he said he wanted to do is responsible for the cant about Impressionist "formlessness," which is a contradiction in terms. How could Impressionism have eventuated in great painting, as it did, if it had been "formless"?) What Cézanne wanted was a different, more emphatic, and supposedly more "permanent" kind of unity, more tangible in its articulation. Committed though he was to the motif in nature in all its givenness, he still felt that it could not of its own accord provide a sufficient basis of pictorial unity; that had to be read into it by a combination of thought and feeling—thought that was not a matter of extra-pictorial rules, but of consistency, and feeling that was not a matter of sentiment, but of sensation.

The old masters assumed that the joints and members of a picture's composition should be as apprehensible as those of architecture; the eye was led through a rhythmically organized system of concavities and convexities, with manifold gradations of value simulating depth and volume marshaled around salient points of interest. To accommodate the weightless, flattened shapes produced by the divided tones of Impressionism to such schemes was obviously unfeasible.¹ Cézanne had to fill in his forms more solidly in order to be plausible in that direction. He set out to convert the Impressionist method of registering purely optical variations of color into a method by which to indicate variations of depth and planear direction *through*, rather than for the sake of, variations of color. Nature still came first, and indispensable to nature was the direct, light-suffused color of Impressionism; gradations of dark and light and the controlled studio illumination of the old masters were unnatural—

1. Seurat too wanted a design in depth that would be tighter and more explicitly intelligible than that of the Impressionists. But his *magnum opus*, "*La Grande Jatte*," which is now in the Art Institute at Chicago, fails because the stepped-back, rigidly demarcated planes upon which he set his figures serve only to give them the character—as Sir Kenneth Clark points out—of pasteboard silhouettes. Seurat's pointillist, hyper-Impressionist method of filling in color could not convey a semblance of volume within any illusion of deep space.

regardless of all the masterpieces that had been produced with their aid.

Recording with a separate dab of paint almost every perceptible—or inferred—shift of direction by which the presented surface of an object defines the shape of the volume it encloses, he began in his late thirties to cover his canvases with a mosaic of brush-strokes whose net effect was to call attention to the physical picture plane just as much as the tighter-woven touches of the orthodox Impressionists did. The distortions of Cézanne's drawing, provoked by the extremely literal exactness of his vision as well as by a growing compulsion, more or less unconscious, to adjust the representation in depth to the two-dimensional surface pattern, contributed further to his inadvertent emphasis on the flat plane. Whether he wanted it or not—and one can't be sure he did—the resulting ambiguity was a triumph of art, if not of naturalism. A new and powerful kind of pictorial tension was set up such as had not been seen in the West since the mosaic murals of fourth and fifth century Rome. The little overlapping rectangles of paint, laid on with no attempt to fuse their dividing edges, drew the depicted forms toward the surface while, at the same time, the modeling and contouring of these forms, as achieved by the paint dabs, pulled them back again into illusionist depth. The result was a never-ending vibration from front to back and back to front. The old masters had generally sought to avoid effects like this by blending their brush-strokes and covering the surface with glazes to create a neutral, translucent texture through which the illusion could glow with the least acknowledgment of the medium—*ars est artem celare*.—This is not to say, however, that they paid no heed at all to surface pattern; they did. But given their different aim, they put a different, less obvious yet less ambiguous emphasis upon it. Cézanne, in spite of himself, was trying to give the picture surface its due as a physical entity. The old masters had conceived of it more abstractly.

He was one of the most intelligent painters about painting whose observations have been recorded. (That he could be rather intelligent about other things too has been obscured by his eccentricity and the profound and self-protective irony with which he tried, in the latter part of his life, to make himself a conformist in matters separate from art.) But intelligence does not guarantee a precise awareness on the artist's part of what he is doing or really wants to do. Cézanne overestimated the power of a conception to control, or deposit itself in, works of art. Consciously, it was the most exact reproduction of his sensations in the presence of nature that he was after, ordered more or less according to classical precepts of design. This, he seemed to feel, would assure to the individual work a unity, and therefore a power, analogous to nature's own. The power would be made permanent by human thought as felt

through the design and composition. Loyalty to his sensations meant for him transcribing the distance from his eye of every part of the motif, down to the smallest facet-plane into which he could analyze it. It also meant disregarding the texture, the smoothness and roughness, hardness and softness, the tactile feel of objects, and seeing color exclusively as a determinant of spatial position—just as the orthodox Impressionists saw it exclusively as a determinant of light. But Cézanne's actual view of nature—with its habit of bringing the background and distant objects closer than the ordinary eye saw them—could no more be fitted into the spacious architectural schemes of the old masters than could that of the Impressionists. The old masters did not sniff every inch of space and fix it exactly; they elided and glided, stopping to be definite only at those places to which they designedly pointed the spectator's eye; in between they painted for realistic effect, but not for the optical or spatial substance of reality. That was left for the nineteenth century, for painters most of whom Cézanne scorned. But he was even further from the old masters in his means than they: his registration of what he saw was too dense, not in detail but in feeling; his pictures were too compact and the individual picture too even in its compactness, since every sensation produced by the motif was equally important once its "human interest" was excluded. As often happens when the rectangle is tightly filled, the weight of the painting was pushed forward, with its masses and hollows squeezed together and threatening to fuse into a single form whose shape coincided with that of the canvas itself. Cézanne's desire to give Impressionism a solid aspect was thus shifted in its fulfillment from the structure of the pictorial illusion to the configuration of the picture as an object—as a flat surface. He got the solidity he was after, but it became in large part a two-dimensional solidity. It could hardly have been otherwise in any case once he abandoned modeling in darks and lights—even though his perception of cool tones such as green and blue in receding planes preserved something of the essence of that kind of modeling. This too was a factor in the play of tensions.

The real problem would seem to have been, not how to re-do Poussin according to nature, but how to relate more carefully than he had every part of the illusion in depth to a surface pattern endowed with equally valid aesthetic rights. The firmer binding of the three-dimensional illusion to a decorative surface effect, the integration of plasticity and decoration—that was the true object of Cézanne's quest. And it was here that his expressed theory contradicted his practice most. As far as I know, not once in his recorded remarks does he show any concern with the decorative factor except—and his words here are perhaps

the more revelatory because they are offhand—to refer to two of his favorites, Rubens and Veronese, as “the decorative masters.”

No wonder he complained to the day of his death of his inability to “realize.” The aesthetic effect toward which his means urged was not that which his mind had conceived out of the desire for the organized maximum of an illusion of solidity and depth. Every brush-stroke that followed a fictive plane into fictive depth harked back by reason of its abiding, unequivocal character as a mark made by a brush, to the physical fact of the medium; the shape and placing of that mark recalled the shape and position of the flat rectangle that was the original canvas, now covered with pigments that came from tubes or pots. Cézanne made no bones about the tangibility of the medium: there it was in all its grossness of matter. He said, “One has to be a painter through the qualities themselves of painting, one has to use coarse materials.”

For a long while he over-packed his canvases as he groped his way, afraid to betray his sensations by omission, afraid to be inexact because incomplete. Many—though by no means all—of his reputed masterpieces of the 1870's and 1880's I find too redundant, too cramped, lacking in unity because lacking in modulation. There is feeling in the parts, in the magnificent execution, but too little of feeling that precipitates itself as an instantaneous whole. In the last ten or fifteen years of his life, however, pictures whose power is complete as well as striking and original come from his easel more frequently. Practice, the means, fulfills itself. The illusion of depth is constructed with the surface plane more vividly in mind; the surface does not override the illusion but it does control it. The facet-planes jump forward from the images they define, to become more conspicuously elements of the abstract surface pattern; distinct and more summarily applied, the dabs of paint stand out in Cubist fashion, dilating and their edges trembling. The artist seems to relax his demand for exactness of hue in passing from one form to the next, and he no longer clots his dabs and facet-planes so close together. More air and light circulate through the imagined space. As Cézanne digs deeper behind his shapes with ultramarine, instead of fixing their contours more firmly in place in the illusion, he makes them oscillate, and the backward and forward movement within the picture spreads and at the same time becomes more majestic in its rhythm because more unified and all-enveloping. Monumentality is no longer secured at the price of a dry airlessness. The paint itself becomes more succulent and luminous as it is applied with a larger brush and more oil. The image exists in an atmosphere made intenser because more exclusively pictorial, the result of a heightened tension between the illusion and the independent abstractness of the formal facts. This tension is the emblem

both of an originality and a mastery. It is present in all successful art, but it is particularly, uniquely, perhaps more immediately, there in the works of Cézanne's old age.

Had Cézanne died in 1890 he would still be enormous, but more so in innovation than realization. That fullest, triumphant unity which crowns the painter's work, which arrives when the ends are tightly locked to the means, when all parts fall into place and require and create one another so that they flow inexorably into a whole, when one can, as it were, experience the picture like a single sound made by many voices and instruments that reverberates without changing, that presents an enclosed and instantaneous yet infinite variety—this unity comes for him far more often in the last years of his life. Then, certainly, his art does something other than what he said he wanted it to. Though he may think just as much about its problems, he thinks much less into its execution. Having attracted young admirers who listen respectfully, he expands a little, has his remarks taken down, and writes letters about his "method." But if he did not confuse Bernard, Gasquet, and the others of that time, he confuses us now. However, I prefer to think with Erle Loran² that he himself was confused and contradictory in theorizing about his art. It is as difficult in art as it is in politics for a revolutionary to realize the meaning of what he has done. And didn't Cézanne complain that Emile Bernard, with his appetite for theories, forced him to theorize unduly? (Bernard in his turn criticized Cézanne for painting too much by theory.)

Down to the last day of his life Cézanne continued to harp on the necessity of modeling, and of completeness and exactness in reporting his sensations of space. He stated his ideal as a marriage between *trompe-l'oeil* and the laws of the medium, and lamented his failure to achieve this even as his painting, under his hand, went further and further in the opposite direction. In the same month in which he died he complained still of his inability to "realize." Actually one is more surprised, in view of how remote the qualities of his last pictures are from his expressed intentions, to hear him say, as he did, that he had made "a little progress." He condemned Gauguin and Van Gogh for painting flatly: "I have never wanted and will never accept the lack of modeling or gradation: it's an absurdity. Gauguin was not a painter; he only made Chinese pictures." And he was indifferent, as Bernard reports, to the primitives of the Renaissance; they too, apparently, were too flat

2. I am indebted to his book, *Cézanne's Composition* (University of California Press, 1943), for more than a few insights into the master's art. As far as I know, Professor Loran is the first to point to the essential importance of Cézanne's drawing and line—the fundamentals of surface pattern—and to argue against the too exclusive attention paid to his color modeling.

for his taste. Yet the path—of which he said he himself was the primitive, and by following which he thought to rescue Western tradition's pledge to the three-dimensional from both Impressionist haze and Gauguinesque decoration—led straight, in an interval of only five or six years after his death, to a kind of painting as flat as any the West had seen since the Middle Ages.

Picasso's and Braque's Cubism, and Léger's, completed what Cézanne had begun, by their successes divesting his means of whatever had remained problematical about them and finding them their most appropriate ends. These means they took from Cézanne practically ready-made, and they were able to adapt them to their own purposes after only a relatively few trial exercises. Because he had exhausted so little of his own insights, he could offer the Cubists all the resources of a new discovery without requiring that much effort be spent in the process itself of discovery. This was the Cubists' luck, and it helps explain why Picasso and Braque were able, in the four or five years between 1909 and 1914, to turn out a well-nigh uninterrupted succession of "realizations," classical in the sufficiency of their strength, the unerring adjustment of means to ends, and the largeness, ease, and sureness of their unity.

. . . Cézanne's sincerity and steadfastness are exemplary. Great painting, he says in effect, ought to be produced the way Rubens, Velasquez, Veronese, and Delacroix did, but my sensations and capacities don't correspond to theirs, and I feel and paint only the way I must. And so he went at it for forty years, day in and out, with his clean, careful *métier*, dipping his brush in turpentine between each stroke to wash it, and then carefully depositing its load of paint in its determined place. As far as I know, no novels have been made of his life since his death, but it was more heroic as an artist's than Gauguin's or Van Gogh's, notwithstanding its material ease. Think of the effort of abstraction and of eyesight that was necessary in order to analyze every part of every motif into its smallest calculable plane. And then there were the crises of confidence that overtook him almost every other day (he was also a forerunner in his paranoia). Yet he did not go altogether crazy; he stuck it out at his own sedentary pace, rewarded for his premature old age, his diabetes, his lack of recognition by the public, and the crabbed emptiness of what seems to have been his existence away from his art, by absorption in the activity itself of painting—even if, in his own eyes, it was without final success. He considered himself a weakling, "a Bohemian," frightened by the routine difficulties of life, but he had a temperament, and he sought out the most redoubtable challenges the art of his time could offer.

Clement Greenberg

THEATER CHRONICLE

LITERATURE ON BROADWAY

Adapted by Sidney Kingsley from Koestler's novel about a former Bolshevik destroyed by Stalinism and his own sophistry, *Darkness At Noon* makes a fairly effective play. The novel was good, the adaptation is intelligent, and the Frederick Fox *décor*, representing a prison cell and corridor, is ingenious. Indeed only a story as strong as Koestler's could keep its face straight in the presence of this versatile set, which is constantly rearranging itself or dissolving into transparency in obedience to the hero's need of communicating with his fellow-prisoners, his examiners, or his past. Even then it threatens at moments to take over, like Frankenstein. If decorum is preserved, that fact is also due to the good acting of Claude Rains as Rubashov the Old Bolshevik and of Walter J. Palance as Gletkin the new Stalinist. With his curious mortuary charm of physique and voice, this Gletkin is a believable monster, a real creation instead of a mere caricature. Palance gives rein to whatever may be daemonically appealing in the power, clairvoyance, and composure of a representative of the police state—appealing, that is, to one who like Rubashov helped to father that state. If Rubashov, in the course of his degeneration, comes actually to feel love for Gletkin, exchanging his role of indignant paternalism for that of a kind of praise-hungry child, this development remains emotionally intelligible to the audience. Yet Rains, with his rare talent for giving authority, together with an easy grace, to the portrayal of public men, maintains Rubashov's salience in the play and brings the Old Bolshevik's story momentarily to life out of the groaning past of Lubianka prison.

As in the novel, Rubashov capitulates and dies and the action ends in the total defeat of the individual. This grim outcome, reproduced with terrible monotony in recent political literature, is here implicit in the play's materials and theme; and in *Billy Budd*, the play made by Louis O. Coxe and Robert Chapman from Melville's story, a similar outcome is given by very different circumstances. Both are "morality

plays"¹ conceived in political settings, and both deal with problems of authority.

"Pray for those who must make choices," Captain Vere begs of Billy Budd at the end; and it is clear that the playwrights have read Sartre as well as Melville. But they have not existentialized too much. They have only, I think, concentrated Melville's meaning, as any play based on the story would have to do, and as that remarkable and slightly vapoing story might better have done itself. Nor have they remained indifferent to the mythical resonance of the original. The play is not *better* than Melville's novel but it is worthy of it.

By setting his story in the atmosphere of the French Revolution and the Great Mutiny, by introducing a hundred details such as the fact that Billy's former ship was named *The Rights of Man*, Melville must have intended in part a political-moral tale turning on the choice between order and justice. At the same time, his *Billy Budd* is no smug conservative tract. The actual choice looms as tragic, indeed excruciating; and, as Newton Arvin, Richard Chase, and other critics have shown, it opens out into a large domain of other meanings, metaphysical, ritualistic, and sentimental. In the tragedy of his primitive innocence Billy Budd re-enacts the fall of man; his associates meanwhile feed upon his spiritual vitality like communicants upon the Host; finally there is the homo-erotic celebration of what Chase calls "that peculiarly American God, the beatified boy."

The play, as I say, is deaf to none of these overtones, in either the writing or the production. Acted by Charles Nolte, Billy Budd is not only the beatified but the beautified boy; yet the effect of Nolte's perhaps excessive good looks is offset by the dignity of his performance and the warmth of his voice (I can still hear him drawling to Claggart: "Why should I be afraid of you, sir? You speak to me friendly when we meet.") In the conception of the part, however, as in that of Claggart (equally well performed by Torin Thatcher), lies the main difficulty of the play. For Melville, the two represented between them pure innocence and pure depravity, absolutes with which neither morality nor, as a rule, drama, has much to do. By relating the story in his indirect and retrospective way, Melville was able to avoid, or perhaps only evade, the difficulties. But the playwrights, because they must present the two men in the flesh, try to attach to each a rudimentary psychology. This will not stand very close scrutiny. Billy is simply made boyish and Claggart is given a kind of Byron complex: the rueful air and rhetoric of one

1. The term used by Coxe and Chapman to describe their piece in a note to the text, published by the Princeton University Press at \$1.50.

forced to do evil despite himself. The parts are well written, however, and Claggart's has the advantage of fitting in with the general atmosphere of fatality, an atmosphere to which Captain Vere, with his hard choice, is of course the main contributor. (Vere's part was finely played by Dennis King).

I saw *Billy Budd* at a matinee performance which was then believed to be the penultimate one (due to close that night, the play was later continued indefinitely). So good was the cast, under Norris Houghton's direction, and so receptive the audience that no one laughed when the final curtain got stuck halfway and a man in the seat next to mine, a paraplegic, exclaimed loudly and with total solemnity, "The curtain never comes down on the problem of evil!" All this *Billy Budd* took in its symbolic stride; and in fact, apart from larger questions, the play is an admirable piece of plotting and writing, on which Coxe and Chapman were at work for some four years, having begun it in 1947 when they were students at Princeton, and then presented it in an earlier version at the Experimental Theatre in 1949. It represents a peculiar success of collaboration between the two of them as well as between them and Melville; for whatever they owe to his conceptions, the excellent theater work is theirs, and so is most of the dialogue, that of the crew being especially good; and in O'Daniel, an inspired case of the stage Irishman, they invented on their own a minor character of charm and force.

The Rose Tattoo is based on no single book but it derives, however indirectly, from books. The successor to Odets and Saroyan as a literary playwright, Tennessee Williams has his own vein of native realism, which he naturally deepens by levying upon various novelists—let us say Caldwell for racy detail, Anderson, Lawrence, and Steinbeck for ideas. I have read that *The Rose Tattoo* represents an advance over his other plays because the main character, again a woman, is here more forcible than those Southern ladies with their exasperated gentility who, in my innocence, I believed to be Williams' best creations. Serafina, the heroine of *The Rose Tattoo*, is forcible and she is a good character. I do not see that she is better than her predecessors, and for the rest the play is pretty disorganized.

It begins well: Williams' ability, rare on Broadway, instantly to toss together an intense human situation, is evident in the early scenes of *The Rose Tattoo*, laid in a sort of shanty town inhabited by Sicilians on the outskirts of New Orleans. Serafina's husband is killed suddenly; we know, as she does not, that he has been unfaithful to her. We watch her engaged in the orgiastic process of dedicating her life and sex to his

memory, a process that includes her becoming a tyrant to her daughter, outraging the neighbors, and defying the authorities. There is vivid action on the stage; there are real scenes, as when Serafina compels her daughter's sweetheart, a sailor, to kneel and swear to the Virgin that he will protect the girl's innocence. But soon the play starts flying to pieces (aided by a production which, save for Maureen Stapleton's tumultuous performance as Serafina, is farced-up and over-paced in the worst Broadway style). Improvisation now reigns; anything may happen, one feels. Even then one is taken aback (*honestly shocked* are perhaps the words) when Serafina's daughter, a pretty girl in her teens, is shown trying to argue her sweetheart (Melville's Handsome Sailor with a difference) into breaking his vow and sleeping with her—a delicate scene at best but written by Williams with a nervous shrillness.

Why does *The Rose Tattoo* disintegrate? Partly, no doubt, because it depends on a tradition of American exoticism that was already frayed in the days of *Tortilla Flat* and now hangs together by a thread. It may or may not be true, as the tradition maintains and as Serafina is always demonstrating, that our marginal primitives are better-sexed—for that is what it amounts to—than are Americans of the majority. However that may be, has not the contention become a convention? For Williams, there is only enough virtue left in it to inspire the portrait of Serafina, which in itself is good. But a consciousness of anything *opposed* to the tradition fails to materialize for him. Hence, after the early raptures of *The Rose Tattoo*, no real conflict, no characters, no structure, no play, no literature.

F. W. Dupee

Randall Jarrell

REFLECTIONS ON WALLACE STEVENS

Let me begin with a quotation from Stendhal: "‘What I find completely lacking in all these people,’ thought Lucien, ‘is the unexpected. . . .’ He was reduced to philosophizing." In my quotation Lucien stands for Stevens, "these people" for America and Business, "the unexpected" for Culture, the exotic, the past, the Earth-minus-America; "philosophizing" stands for, alas! philosophizing. . . . But before Stevens was reduced to it, he drew the unexpected from a hundred springs. There has never been a travel poster like *Harmonium*: how many of its readers must have sold what they had, given the money to steamship agents, and gone to spend the rest of their lives in Lhasa. Yet there was nothing really unusual in what Stevens felt. To have reached, in 1900, in the United States, the age of twenty-one, or fifteen, or twelve—as Stevens and Pound and Eliot did—this was so hard a thing for poets, went so thoroughly against the grain, that they emigrated as soon as they could, or stayed home and wrote poems in which foreignness, pastness, is itself a final good. "But how absurd!" a part of anyone protests. "Didn't they realize that, to a poet, New York City means just as much as Troy and Jerusalem and all the rest of those *immensely overpaid accounts* that Whitman begged the Muse, *install'd amid the kitchenware*, to cross out?" They didn't realize it; if one realizes it, one is not a poet. The accounts have been overpaid too many years for people ever to stop paying; to keep on paying them is to be human. To be willing to give up Life for the last local slice of it, for all those Sears Roebuck catalogues which, as businessmen and generals say, would be the most effective propaganda we could possibly drop on the Russians—this is a blinded chauvinism, a provincialism in space and time, which is even worse than that vulgar exoticism which disregards both what we have kept and what we are unique in possessing, which gives up *Moby Dick* for the Journals of André Gide. Our most disastrous lacks—delicacy, awe, order, natural magnificence and piety,

"the exquisite errors of time," and the rest; everything that is neither bought, sold, nor imagined on Sunset Boulevard or in Times Square; everything the absence of which made Lorca think Hell a city very like New York—these things were the necessities of Stevens' spirit. Some of his poems set about supplying these lacks—from other times and places, from the underlying order of things, from the imagination; other poems look with mockery and despair at the time and place that cannot supply them, that does not even desire to supply them; other poems reason or seem to reason about their loss, about their nature, about their improbable restoration. His poetry is obsessed with lack, a lack at last almost taken for granted, that he himself automatically supplies; if sometimes he has restored by imagination or abstraction or re-creation, at other times he has restored by collection, almost as J. P. Morgan did—Stevens likes something, buys it (at the expense of a little spirit), and ships it home in a poem. The feeling of being a leisured, cultivated, and sympathetic tourist (in a time-machine, sometimes) is essential to much of his work; most of his contact with values is at the distance of knowledge and regret—an aesthete's or an archaeologist's contact with a painting, not a painter's.

Many of Stevens' readers have resented his—so to speak—spending his time collecting old porcelain: "if old things are what you want," they felt, "why don't you collect old Fords or Locomobiles or Stutz Bearcats, or old Mother Bloors, right here at home?" But, for an odd reason, people have never resented the cruel truths or half-truths he told them about the United States. Once upon a time Richard Dehmel's poems, accused of obscenity, were acquitted on the grounds that they were incomprehensible—and almost exactly this happened to Stevens' home-truths. Yet they were plain, sometimes. Looking at General Jackson confronting the "mockers, the mickey mockers," Stevens decided what the "American Sublime" is: the sublime "comes down/ To the spirit itself,/ The spirit and space,/ The empty spirit/ In vacant space." Something like this is true, perhaps, always and everywhere; yet it is a hard truth for your world to have reduced you to: it is no wonder the poem ends, "What wine does one drink?/ What bread does one eat?" And in "The Common Life" the church steeple is a "black line beside a white line," not different in any way from "the stack of the electric plant"; in the "flat air," the "morbid light," a man is "a result, a demonstration"; the men "have no shadows/ And the women only one side." We live "no longer on the ancient cake of seed,/ The almond and deep fruit. . . . We feast on human heads"; the table is a mirror and the diners eat reflections of themselves. "The steeples are empty and so

are the people," he says in "Loneliness in Jersey City"; the poem is full of a despairing frivolity, as Stevens looks from Room 2903 out over that particular countryside which, I think, God once sent angels to destroy, but which the angels thought worse than anything they could do to it. And "In Oklahoma,/ Bonnie and Josie,/ Dressed in calico,/ Danced around a stump./ They cried,/ 'Ohoyaho,/ Ohoo' . . ./ Celebrating the marriage/ Of flesh and air." Without what's superfluous, the excess of the spirit, man is a poor, bare, forked animal. In "Country Words" the poet sits under the willows of exile, and sings "like a cuckoo clock" to Belshazzar, that "putrid rock,/ Putrid pillar of a putrid people"; he sings "an old rebellious song,/ An edge of song that never clears." But if it should clear, if the cloud that hangs over his heart and mind should lift, it would be because Belshazzar heard and understood:

*What is it that my feeling seeks?
I know from all the things it touched
And left beside and left behind.
It wants the diamond pivot bright.
It wants Belshazzar reading right
The luminous pages on his knee,
Of being, more than birth and death.
It wants words virile with his breath.*

If this intellectual is "isolated," it is not because he wants to be. . . . But Stevens' most despairing, amusing, and exactly realized complaint is "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock":

*The houses are haunted
By white nightgowns.
None are green,
Or purple with green rings,
Or green with yellow rings,
Or yellow with blue rings.
None of them are strange,
With socks of lace
And beaded ceintures.
People are not going
To dream of baboons and periwinkles.
Only, here and there, an old sailor,
Drunk and asleep in his boots,
Catches tigers
In red weather.*

Any schoolboy (of the superior Macaulayish breed) more or less feels what this poem means, but it is interesting to look at one or two details. Why *ten o'clock*? They have all gone to bed early, like good sensible machines; and the houses' ghosts, now, are only nightgowns, the plain white nightgowns of the Common Man, Economic Man, Rational Man—pure commonplace, no longer either individual or strange or traditional; and the dreams are as ordinary as the nightgowns. Here and there a drunken and disreputable *old sailor* still lives in the original reality (he doesn't dream of catching, he *catches*): *sailor* to bring in old-fashioned Europe, old-fashioned Asia, the old-fashioned ocean; *old* to bring in the past, to make him a dying survival. What indictment of the Present has ever compared, for flat finality, with "People are not going/ To dream of baboons and periwinkles"? Yet isn't this poem ordinarily considered a rather nonsensical and Learish poem?

It is not until later that Stevens writes much about what America has in common with the rest of the world; then he splits everything differently, and contrasts with the past of America and of the world their present. In *Harmonium* he still loves America best when he can think of it as wilderness, naturalness, pure potentiality (he treats with especial sympathy Negroes, Mexican Indians, and anybody else he can consider wild); and it is this feeling that is behind the conclusion of "Sunday Morning":

*She hears, upon that water without sound,
A voice that cries, "The tomb in Palestine
Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay."
We live in an old chaos of the sun,
Or old dependency of day and night,
Or island solitude, unsponsored, free,
Of that wide water, inescapable.
Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
And, in the isolation of the sky,
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink
Downward to darkness, on extended wings.*

Here—in the last purity and refinement of the grand style, as perfect, in its calm transparency, as the best of Wordsworth—is the last wilderness, come upon so late in the history of mankind that it is no longer

seen as the creation of God, but as the Nature out of which we evolve; man without myth, without God, without anything but the universe which has produced him, is given an extraordinarily pure and touching grandeur in these lines—lines as beautiful, I think, as any in American poetry. Yet Stevens himself nearly equals them in two or three parts of *Esthétique du Mal*, the best of his later poems; there are in *Harmonium* eight or ten of the most beautiful poems an American has written; and a book like *Parts of a World* is delightful as a whole, even though it contains no single poem that can compare with the best in *Harmonium*. But *Auroras of Autumn*, Stevens' last book,¹ is a rather different affair. One sees in it the distinction, intelligence, and easy virtuosity of a master—but it would take more than these to bring to life so abstract, so monotonous, so overwhelmingly *characteristic* a book. Poems like these are, always, the product of a long process of evolution; in Stevens' case the process has been particularly interesting.

The habit of philosophizing in poetry—or of seeming to philosophize, of using a philosophical tone, images, constructions, of having quasi-philosophical daydreams—has been unfortunate for Stevens. Poetry is a bad medium for philosophy. Everything in the philosophical poem has to satisfy irreconcilable requirements: for instance, the last demand that we should make of philosophy (that it be interesting) is the first we make of a poem; the philosophical poet has an elevated and methodical, but forlorn and absurd air as he works away at his flying tank, his sewing-machine that also plays the piano. (One thinks of Richard Wilbur's graceful "Tom Swift has vanished too,/ Who worked at none but wit's expense,/ Putting dirigibles together,/ Out in the yard, in the quiet weather,/ Whistling behind Tom Sawyer's fence.") When the first thing that Stevens can find to say of the Supreme Fiction is that "it must be *abstract*," the reader protests, "Why, even Hegel called it a *concrete* universal"; the poet's medium, words, is abstract to begin with, and it is only his unique organization of the words that forces the poem, generalizations and all, over into the concreteness and singularity that it exists for. But Stevens has the weakness—a terrible one for a poet, a steadily increasing one in Stevens—of thinking of particulars as primarily illustrations of general truths, or else as aesthetic, abstracted objects, simply there to be contemplated; he often treats things or lives so that they seem no more than generalizations of an unprecedentedly low order. But surely a poet *has* to treat the concrete as primary, as something far more than an instance, a hue to be sensed, a member

1. *Auroras of Autumn*. Knopf. \$3.00.

of a laudable category—for him it is always the generalization whose life is derived, whose authority is delegated. Goethe said, quite as if he were talking about Stevens: “It makes a great difference whether the poet seeks the particular in relation to the universal or contemplates the universal in the particular . . . [In the first case] the particular functions as an example, as an instance of the universal; but the second indeed represents the very nature of poetry. He who grasps this particular as living essence also encompasses the universal.”

As a poet Stevens has every gift but the dramatic. It is the lack of immediate contact with lives that hurts his poetry more than anything else, that has made it easier and easier for him to abstract, to philosophize, to treat the living dog that wags its tail and bites you as the “canoid patch” of the epistemologist analyzing that great problem, the world; as the “cylindrical arrangement of brown and white” of the aesthetician analyzing that great painting, the world. Stevens knows better, often for poems at a time:

At dawn,
*The paratroopers fall and as they fall
 They mow the lawn. A vessel sinks in waves
 Of people, as big bell-billows from its bell
 Bell-bellow in the village steeple. Violets,
 Great tufts, spring up from buried houses
 Of poor, dishonest people, for whom the steeple,
 Long since, rang out farewell, farewell, farewell.*

This is a map with people living on it. Yet it is fatally easy for the scale to become too small, the distance too great, and us poor, dishonest people no more than data to be manipulated.

As one reads Stevens' later poetry one keeps thinking that he needs to be possessed by subjects, to be shaken out of himself, to have his subject individualize his poem; one remembers longingly how much more individuation there was in *Harmonium*—when you're young you try to be methodical and philosophical, but reality keeps breaking in. The best of *Harmonium* exists at a level that it is hard to rise above; and Stevens has had only faintly and intermittently the dramatic insight, the capacity to be obsessed by lives, actions, subject-matter, the chameleon's shameless interest in everything but itself, that could have broken up the habit and order and general sobering matter-of-factness of age. Often, nowadays, he seems disastrously set in his own ways, a fossil imprisoned in the rock of himself—the best marble but, still, marble.

All his *tunk-a-tunks*, his *hoo-goo-boos*—those mannered, manufactured, individual, uninteresting little sound-inventions—how typical they are of the lecture-style of the English philosopher, who makes grunts or odd noises, uses homely illustrations, and quotes day in and day out from *Alice*, in order to give what he says some appearance of that raw reality it so plainly and essentially lacks. These “tootings at the wedding of the soul” are fun for the tooter, but get as dreary for the reader as do all the foreign words—a few of these are brilliant, a few more pleasant, and the rest a disaster: “one cannot help deploring his too extensive acquaintance with the foreign languages,” as Henry James said, of Walt Whitman, to Edith Wharton.

Stevens is never more philosophical, abstract, rational, than when telling us to put our faith in nothing but immediate sensations, perceptions, aesthetic particulars; for this is only a generalization offered for assent, and where in the ordinary late poem are the real particulars of the world—the people, the acts, the lives—for us to put our faith in? And when Stevens makes a myth to hold together aesthetic particulars and generalizations, it is as if one were revisited by the younger Saint-Simon, Comte, and that actress who played Reason to Robespierre’s approving glare; Stevens’ myths spring not from the soil but from the clouds, the arranged, scrubbed, reasoning clouds in someone’s head. He is too rational and composedly fanciful a being to make up a myth—one could as easily imagine his starting a cult in Los Angeles. When one reads most eighteenth-century writing one is aware of some man of good sense and good taste and good will at the bottom of everything and everybody; but in Stevens—who is always swinging between baroque and rococo, and reminds one of the eighteenth century in dozens of ways—this being at the bottom of everything is cultivated and appreciative and rational out of all reason: the Old Adam in everybody turns out to be not Robinson Crusoe but Bernard Berenson.

Metastasio began as an improviser and ended as a poet; as one reads the average poem in *Auroras of Autumn* one feels that the opposite has been happening to Stevens. A poem begins, revealingly: “An exercise in viewing the world./ On the motive! But one looks at the sea/ As one improvises, on the piano.” And not the sea only. One reads a book like this with odd mixed pleasure, not as if one were reading poems—which are either successful or unsuccessful, which “come shut with a click like a closing box”—but as if one were reading some *Travel-Diary of an Aesthetician*, who works more for pleasure than for truth, puts in entries regularly, and gives one continual pleasure in incidentals, in good phrases, interesting ideas, delicate perceptions, but

who hardly tries to subordinate his Method to the requirements of any particular situation or material. The individual poems are less and less differentiated; the process is always more evident than what is being processed; everything is so familiarly contrived by will and habit and rule of thumb (for improvisation, as Virgil Thompson says, "among all the compositional techniques is the one most servile to rules of thumb") that it does not seem to matter exactly which being is undergoing these immemorial metamorphoses. Stevens' passagework, often, is so usual that we can't believe past the form to the matter: what truth could survive these pastry-cook's, spun-sugar, parallel qualifications?

*It was like sudden time in a world without time,
This world, this place, the street in which I was,
Without time: as that which is not has not time,
Is not, or is of what there was, is full. . . .*

And on the shelf below:

*It was nowhere else, it was there and because
It was nowhere else, its place had to be supposed,
Itself had to be supposed, a thing supposed
In a place supposed, a thing that reached
In a place that he reached. . . .*

It is G. E. Moore at the spinet. And it looks worst of all when one compares it with a passage from that classic of our prose, that generalizer from an Age of Reason, that hapless victim of Poetic Diction, that—but let me quote:

*As Hags hold Sabbaths, less for joy than spite,
So these their merry, miserable Night;
Still round and round the Ghosts of Beauty glide,
And haunt the places where their Honor died.
See how the World its Veterans rewards!
A Youth of Frolics, an old Age of Cards;
Fair to no purpose, artful to no end,
Young without Lovers, old without a Friend;
A Fop their Passion, but their Prize a Sot;
Alive, ridiculous, and dead, forgot!*

The immediacy and precision and particularity, the live touch of things, the beauty that exists in precarious perfection in so many poems in *Harmonium*—

the beauty
Of the moonlight
Falling there,
Falling
As sleep falls
In the innocent air—

this, at last, is lost in rhetoric, in elaboration and artifice and contrivance, in an absolutely ecumenical Method of seeing and thinking and expressing, in *Craftsmanship*: why has no loving soul ever given Stevens a copy of that *Principles of Art* in which Collingwood argues at length—many people might say *proves*—that art is not a craft at all? (I hardly dare to quote one great poet's even more sweeping "But I deny that poetry is an art.") In *Auroras of Autumn* one sees almost everything through a shining fog, a habitualness not just of style but of machinery, perception, anything: the green spectacles show us a world of green spectacles; and the reader, staring out into this Eden, thinks timidly: "But it's all so *monotonous*." When Marx said that he wasn't a Marxist he meant, I suppose, that he himself was not one of his own followers, could not be taken in by the prolongation and simplification of his own beliefs that a disciple would make and believe; and there is nothing a successful artist needs to pray so much as: "Lord, don't let me keep on believing *only this*; let me have the courage of something beside my own convictions; let me escape at last from the maze of myself, from the hardening quicksilver womb of my own characteristicalness."

I have felt as free as posterity to talk in this way of Stevens' weaknesses, of this later mold in which he has cast himself, since he seems to me—and seems to my readers, I am sure—one of the great poets of our century, someone whom the world will keep on reading just as it keeps on listening to Vivaldi or Scarlatti, looking at Tiepolo or Poussin. His best poems are the poetry of a man fully human—of someone sympathetic, magnanimous, both brightly and deeply intelligent; the poems see, feel, and think with equal success; they treat with mastery that part of existence which allows of mastery, and experience the rest of it with awe or sadness or delight. Minds of this quality of genius, of this breadth and delicacy of understanding, are a link between us and the past, since they are, for us, the past made living; and they are our surest link with the future, since they are the part of us which the future will know. As one feels the elevation and sweep

and disinterestedness, the thoughtful truthfulness of the best sections of a poem like *Esthétique du Mal*, one is grateful for, overawed by, this poetry that knows so well the size and age of the world; that reminds us, as we sit in chairs procured from the furniture exhibitions of the Museum of Modern Art, of that immemorial order or disorder upon which our present scheme of things is a monomolecular film; that counsels us—as Santayana wrote of Spinoza—“to say to those little gnostics, to those circumnavigators of being: *I do not believe you; God is great.*” Many of the poems look grayly out at “the immense detritus of a world/ That is completely waste, that moves from waste/ To waste, out of the hopeless waste of the past/ Into a hopeful waste to come”; but more of the poems see the unspoilable delights, the inexhaustible interests of existence—when you have finished reading Stevens’ best poems you remember once more that man is not only the jest and riddle of the world, but the glory.

Some of my readers may feel about all this, “But how can you reconcile what you say with the fact that *Auroras of Autumn* is not a good book? Shouldn’t the fully mature Stevens be producing late masterpieces even better than the early ones?” (A similar question concerns *The Cocktail Party*.) All such questions show how necessary it is to think of the poet as somebody who has prepared himself to be visited by a daemon, as a sort of accident-prone worker to whom poems happen—for otherwise we *expect* him to go on writing good poems, better poems, and this is the one thing you cannot expect even of good poets, much less of anybody else. Good painters in their seventies may produce good pictures as regularly as an orchard produces apples; but Planck is a great scientist because he made one discovery as a young man—and I can remember reading in a mathematician’s memoirs a sentence composedly recognizing the fact that, since the writer was now past forty, he was unlikely ever again to do any important creative work in mathematics. A man who is a good poet at forty *may* turn out to be a good poet at sixty; but he is more likely to have stopped writing poems, to be doing exercises in his own manner, or to have reverted to whatever commonplaces were popular when he was young. A good poet is someone who manages, in a lifetime of standing out in thunderstorms, to be struck by lightning five or six times; a dozen or two dozen times and he is great.

BOOKS

FITZGERALD AND AMERICA

The Fitzgerald legend threatens to become something of a bore. For some time now the vogue of the twenties has been booming in all branches of our popular entertainment, as if all America were sighing with nostalgia for its lost youth; and recently when *Life* magazine got around to doing a spread on his life, it was to be expected that this would be announced on the cover, and not altogether unexpected that he should be called the "fabulous" Scott Fitzgerald. Unfortunately, as this popular image becomes more "fabulous," Fitzgerald begins to repose in the bier of the popular imagination alongside of some other stricken youthful hero like Rudolph Valentino. Budd Schulberg's novel, *The Disenchanted*, was not at all as bad as some critics made out, and it did have many sharp and observing moments, but still there were times when the young hero-worshipping protagonist seemed to be gazing at Manley Halliday (the fictional counterpart of Fitzgerald) with the trembling wide-eyed stare that an American youth usually reserves for his private athletic hero, or a bobby-soxer for her favorite male movie star. My imagination begins to be haunted by the next possible step: a song-and-dance representing Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald whirling through the twenties, to be added as another skit to the current musical comedy *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. The legend, in short, threatens to fasten upon those things in Fitzgerald's life and writings that are most perishable; and before it does, we ought to put ourselves at a little distance from it, and ask why this legend itself should become so urgent for us now, and whether it does not conceal a meaning a little more damaging than we had thought to our own American self-esteem.

We are helped toward this by the appearance of Arthur Mizener's solid, scholarly, and altogether admirable biography,¹ which, among other merits, never allows us to forget that Fitzgerald was first of all an author, devoted to his *métier* and capable of working, in the face of various personal disasters, with prodigious and feverish energy as long as his daemon and physical resources permitted him. Mizener does not try to jazz up his material; he has balance, sobriety, and, above every-

1. THE FAR SIDE OF PARADISE. By Arthur Mizener. Houghton Mifflin. \$4.00.

thing else, the first requirement of the successful biographer: a deep immersion in his subject. He has worked up all the materials, and if on some points we might like a little more information, we feel that this must be withheld out of consideration for persons still living or that if Mizener doesn't know the facts, probably nobody else does either. We might have had, for example, a little more about Fitzgerald's parents. They were a curious, and in his case in many ways a decisive, heredity: the father of genteel old American stock, quiet, honorable, and a failure; the mother, offspring of the immigrant Irish, dominating and eccentric. The desire for more analysis of this background can hardly be considered a gratuitous thirst for scandal when we are dealing with a writer who worked, as Fitzgerald did, off and on for several years on a novel about a matricide, and who, though he admired his father, was always haunted by the sense that the latter had been a failure. Moreover, Mizener does not, it seems to me, deal adequately or even frankly with one fact that stares out at us from Fitzgerald's life and printed page: that he was never quite reconciled to being Irish, and never faced up to that racial self-hatred which afflicts the Irishman in America as powerfully as the Jew. (The figure of the Jew, by the way, seems to have had a curious fascination for Fitzgerald's imagination.) Evidently, Mizener wanted to refrain from risking anything that might look like psychological hypothesis, his aim being to bring forward only the details necessary to establish a portrait, so that this job of deeper interpretation may be left to some subsequent work on Fitzgerald.

The book gets better as it goes on: Mizener is good on the Princeton period, and best of all when he comes to the years as a successful author, after the publication of *This Side of Paradise* in 1920, when Fitzgerald and his wife yielded themselves to the giddy and ecstatic violence of life in the twenties in New York, Paris, and on the Riviera. Here Mizener has very carefully selected and placed his anecdotes so that a real psychological portrait emerges, depicted with considerable economy and skill: the reader is actually able to see the human continuity of the person who was Scott Fitzgerald from his early school days to his death: the spoiled boy, too impulsive and too eager to be liked and therefore always offending his schoolmates, is the same Fitzgerald who tries to attract attention at a Riviera party by throwing a fig at a dowager's back, deliberately courts rebuff by Edith Wharton, wakes up the producer Walter Wanger at five in the morning on a sudden impulse to tell him about an idea for a script; and who finally, near the end of his life and virtually at the end of his rope, inveighs in "The Crack-up" against that lifelong reckless and lavish expenditure of emo-

tion that has reduced him at last to a condition of "emotional bankruptcy."

Mizener moves back and forth smoothly from the life to the writings, tying them together neatly. His criticism of Fitzgerald's work is on the whole sound and just, though not particularly inspired, which perhaps it need not be in a biography whose main intention is to portray a life. The biographer, however, can hardly tell his story without some idea of its ultimate importance, and so we find Mizener, in his introduction, staking a critical claim on Fitzgerald's place beside Hemingway and Faulkner as the three most gifted novelists of their generation. So far as talent and native powers go, we can hardly question this ranking: indeed, in certain particular gifts of the novelist—of social observation and social wit, the beautiful ability to vibrate with atmosphere and emotion, and in the gift of language, especially one that has not been noticed enough, of quick, easy and natural metaphor, like a sudden thrust of summer lightning—Fitzgerald had no peer among the writers of his time. Whether or not in final accomplishment he stands beside Faulkner and Hemingway, is another question, which we may leave to other critics, having here chiefly to meditate upon the significance of the life.

Fitzgerald was, to put it quite simply, a genius—the term cannot now be denied him—but he did not become a great writer, if we use this adjective with a sober consciousness of literary history that in his best moments he would have wanted us to invoke. At 29 he had written *The Great Gatsby*, and at the time one could very well have said that the writer who had done *Gatsby* at 29 should be able to go on to almost anything. Fitzgerald did go on but he did not measure up to this promise, and this failure is usually taken as the real meaning of his life, and, currently, of the legend: a failure of the American myth of the Success Story, which he himself seems to have summed up as the meaning of his career in the now famous statement: "In American lives there are no second acts." All this is very true, but I think we can go deeper. The last pages of *Gatsby* remind us that Fitzgerald's imagination sought for its furthest meanings in the total image of America itself, a reference that takes us well beyond the "fabulous" twenties or the Success Story that still echoes like a tinny tune of that decade; and if we are to find any meaning to his career, it ought to be one commensurate in scope with this total image of America on which, as his notebooks show, he brooded all his life. I suggest that the real drama of Fitzgerald's life is as part of the general drama of the American's emotional innocence before life. Other writers have treated the

theme of American innocence, and Henry James, for one, has given the subject much more explicit and mature treatment in his fiction. But Fitzgerald lived this subject matter, at once wide-awake and violent, with a completeness that leaves us unable to face the stark and unpleasant truth of our innocence from the rather shielded and sometimes even self-indulgent point of view provided by the fictions of James.

In many ways, to be sure, Fitzgerald's was hardly a typical American story. Beyond a certain point, in the story of his life, the tragedy ceases and the accumulating details become so numbing that we no longer respond to the pathos of a human defeat but merely feel that our nerves are being rubbed raw. Alcoholism, a crazy wife, debts, declining popularity as an author, the drying up of the creative wells, physical and emotional exhaustion—after a while the tragic hero fades into the gray and grisly hollow shell of a human being represented by a photograph, which the publishers with a rather delicate sense of the macabre have selected for the book-jacket, showing Fitzgerald in 1937 with an old man's twisted hands, the racked uneven gaze of a reformed alcoholic, and a smile like a toothache. Nevertheless, Fitzgerald's life does not fall outside of tragedy, for at least he shares with the classical tragic hero that central fatal flaw: that he himself willed his own destruction. He did have some very bad strokes of luck which he could hardly have foreseen and for which he was not all responsible, like his wife's going mad; but even here in this most sickening and arbitrary blow dealt him Fitzgerald managed to conspire self-destructively with fate, for one thing this biography shows very well is that he had so built himself into his relation with his wife, and her into himself, that her ruin was bound to drag him down. Character is fate, and Fitzgerald willed his own destruction; observing this, we are not likely to say Fitzgerald was done in by America, the boom and the bust, his wife, the shifting literary climate of the thirties, or any other such external cause; but, having granted all that, we are not altogether exonerated thereby from the question that would relate his self-destruction to the peculiarly destructive and unstable character of so much of American life: Might not a reckless and gifted individual like this have found in another culture some stable way of life, some support outside himself which he might have hung on to, which could not indeed have prevented him from doing himself harm but might at least have preserved him a little better and a little longer from his own nemesis?

It is customary now to speak of Fitzgerald as a double man, and the split in his character Mizener describes as the opposition between "the romantic" and "the spoiled priest." The romanticism is visible

in its most naive and adolescent form in *This Side of Paradise*, and though it was refined and developed as he went on, it is always there in all his writings, and, whatever its deficiencies, it does account for one of his best qualities: that marvelous readiness toward emotion and atmosphere. The "spoiled priest" is Fitzgerald's own description of Dick Diver, hero of *Tender is the Night*, but as applied to the author himself it describes that form of genteel Catholicism (of the lace-curtain Irish) that infected him all his life. This side of Fitzgerald makes a strange irony of the fact that he should be connected so essentially with the Jazz Age, since so deep a part of himself stood outside it: his own moral code had been formed on an earlier one, and he did not really participate in the new code that was born in the twenties. Sexually, he remained a puritan by the standard of the twenties; and perhaps only because so much of the inner man stood apart from it, was he able to be so sensitive an observer of the decade of flaming youth and flappers. The amazing thing, however, is that the romanticism, which developed and matured in the writing, did not do so in Fitzgerald's life, or not in equal measure; and here, I think, we come upon the real division within his character: the split between the writer and the man. When we read now about the horse-play and collegiate antics of Scott, Zelda, and their cronies, our first reaction is to wonder how these people could have gone on so long pretending they were undergraduates without getting very very bored, and particularly how this masquerade was possible for a writer who had already managed the maturity of *Gatsby* and was at work on *Tender Is the Night*. Then one remembers that America is the country where nobody wishes to lose his youth, and where Sinclair Lewis' Babbitts, meeting at their clubs, behave like college boys. The American, in the face of and in spite of everything in life, wishes to persist in believing in his own innocence. When Fitzgerald's innocence could no longer maintain itself against the facts of his own life, there followed the breakdown, the despair, and the howl of disappointment of "The Crack-up."

"The Crack-up" is commonly thought to show us the mature Fitzgerald, who, having survived his ordeals, had at last arrived at a naked and disillusioned view of life. This judgment is true in part, but I am sorry I cannot agree with it entirely, for while "The Crack-up" does show us a Fitzgerald who has learned much, he seems not to have learned enough, or at least not to have passed far enough beyond the attitudes that had dominated him earlier. It is a frightening thing to read: rapid, brilliant, but also jerky and almost metallically tense in tone, as if still vibrating with the receding hysteria of the breakdown.

No doubt Fitzgerald, writing for *Esquire* magazine, felt he had to jazz up his material, but, even with allowance made for this, these pieces leave the impression that the author is still seeing life much too much in literary and dramatic terms. A man writing of his own human defeat and failure ought to have passed beyond "literature" altogether, even to the point of risking a matter-of-factness that might appear prosy and plodding; at least, in this way we are more likely to be convinced we are present at a real human breakdown and not at just another spectacle or fantasy that the writer has to make as peppy as he can. The sharp tooth of disillusion for Fitzgerald is not so much the evil in existence as our necessary participation in it out of self-defense:

And a smile—ah, I would get me a smile. I'm still working on that smile. It is to combine the best qualities of a hotel manager, an experienced social weasel, a headmaster on visitors' day, a colored elevator man, a pansy pulling a profile, a producer getting stuff at half its market value, a trained nurse coming on a job, a body-vendor in her first rotogravure. . . .

This is the howl of the offended innocent discovering the world is not the great big beautiful ballroom he had dreamed. But why, one wonders, should this recognition be so excessive or belated? Didn't Fitzgerald, who had seen the shadowy underside of the world of Daisy and Tom Buchanan, know all this years before? The truth is that he had known this in his fiction, in the lives that his imagination could project, but he had not known it in his own life. This reaction to evil looks too excessive to be convincingly mature: usually our first serious step toward self-knowledge is the painful recognition that we ourselves are not very different, and not really better, than the world or the people who have wronged us. Moreover, the brutal requirements of self-preservation may also be something bracing, without which life in the long run would slop over into something less moral than it is. Morality, decency, and good manners are not manifestations of an overflowing goodness of heart (there would, in that case, be even fewer decent and well-behaved people than there are), but the means whereby, in the midst of the social jungle, we protect ourselves by clearing a little space of order around us. This is the lesson that mature civilizations have always taught us about morals. The rest is only the disappointed cry of Molière's misanthrope at the abomination that hearts are not worn on the sleeve—and Molière, we may note, diagnosed the misanthrope three centuries before Fitzgerald repeated his cries.

Toward the end of the "The Crack-up" Fitzgerald makes the snarling announcement that henceforth he is not going to be had by

anyone, he will be a writer and only a writer, even though this means surrendering the burden and the glory of being a complete human person. As a declaration of the necessary economy of energy, this would be well and good; but such is Fitzgerald's vehemence that his statement seems to carry all the old illusion of the writer's privileged and magical position, as if at the dead end of everything he still refused to admit that he suffered as a man and not as a writer, that his was a human defeat and not the failure of a literary career. A man, in that extremity, ought to know that writing just isn't that important. In a similar tone (and he may have had it directly from Fitzgerald's mouth) Schulberg has his hero, facing death, cry out, "*Give me ten years. Ten years of nothing but work. Never, never let it come second again.*" Fitzgerald's biography would seem to establish just the opposite point: the work must always come second, for life, put second, catches up with you in the long run. No doubt Fitzgerald, remembering all those parties with Zelda, may have thought he had put life first and work second, but that was only the illusion of life; and it would have been better for his work if at a certain period, instead of forcing himself to write on alcohol, he had given it up and tried to reorganize himself so that his writing might eventually flow from another depth.

In the dark night of the soul—Fitzgerald tells us, mixing insomnia with metaphysical anguish—it is always three o'clock in the morning; the words have now a fashionable ring, though he appears to have fidgeted so much before that darkness that it is rather surprising that he should be taken as its authoritative witness. At such moments the only salvation may lie in the darkness itself, before which the ego must consent to flicker out, to give up its feeble claims: the renunciation may in fact turn out to be unnecessary, but only the man who has reached that point is capable of the ultimate reconciliation with life. Though Fitzgerald is voluble about the hopes he has renounced, his volubility itself is too nervous, as if he were still clutching, somewhere at the back of his mind, at the shroud of his dear departed youthful success, the "first act" that would never be repeated. This nervous clutch at the ego seems to be something that dies harder in writers than in other sections of the population. But here too, one can't help wondering whether Fitzgerald understood more in his fiction than in his life, and for the effect of final ambiguity one might throw in that simple but quite wonderful remark by the narrator of *The Last Tycoon*: "Writers aren't people exactly."

If "The Crack-up" does not show us Fitzgerald making the ultimate act of submission to life, nevertheless he does in that work—with his

uncanny sensitivity to the American emotions that victimized him—put his finger on the error of his past that is still the present error of American civilization: “Life,” he says, speaking of his own youth, “was something you dominated if you were any good.” The ideal of mastery of self or (within limitations) of fate is one thing, but the domination of life in which American civilization believes is something very different. It is the belief that life may somehow be dominated *from the outside*, almost as if we Americans possessed a power that could suspend us above our Self, luck, limitations, and death; so that life appears eventually as something not so much to be lived as to be conquered, defiantly as American technology has conquered and dominated its continent, or casually as, in the common illusion, you might think of dominating insomnia by taking a pill.

Almost certainly, Fitzgerald at the time of writing “The Crack-up” did not have left even the physical resources necessary to accomplish a real emotional renewal, and it would be unfair to be preaching at him if one were not also addressing oneself as an American, realizing that a certain brittle quality in his life, and even in his writings, corresponds to a real lack of emotional depth in American life generally. I do not think the present boom will succeed in blowing up the Fitzgerald legend into a great myth for America; on the other hand, there is no doubt about the symbolic aspect of his figure, and the way in which his image can accompany us through certain avenues of our metropolitan existence. On the positive side, the emotional innocence of the American is also a condition of discovery, and Fitzgerald’s work without his wide-eyed romanticism would not be filled with so many things sharply seen and sharply felt—so that his figure is with us too at those moments when we have to remind some of our refugee friends that we Americans, though childish, are not so childish as the foreigner thinks and that we see a good deal more sometimes than the foreigner imagines. Reading “The Crack-up” against the total background of Fitzgerald’s life, we need not find it fantastic to recall another literary expression of a breakdown: Dante exclaiming at the beginning of *The Divine Comedy*, “In the middle of the journey of my life I found myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost.” Ah, how simple life was then, when every experience had its name, every error its opposed and saving truth, and every disaster could be fitted into its redeeming place in the absolute hierarchy. By comparison “The Crack-up” is only a piece of journalism, but, such as it is and with all its limitations of insight, taken with the whole of Fitzgerald’s career, it brings us to the center of

the American experience, where the individual is left wide open to life and must discover for himself everything, or almost everything, that other peoples and peoples of the past could take for granted—but perhaps too, in taking these things for granted, they did not know them as we shall some day know them, if only we survive the learning.

William Barrett

ANTIPODAL FICTION

FROM HERE TO ETERNITY. By James Jones. Scribner's. \$4.50

SUCH DARLING DODOS. By Angus Wilson. Morrow. \$2.50

American fiction has frequently been described as excessively rich in experience but deficient in intellectual control and, in terms of comparison with European literature, both halves of the statement appear to be true beyond debate. It has also seemed to me true that, in terms of the sheer heterogeneity of American society and the indeterminate historic status of all its groups, classes, and regions, American writers have not revealed a width and variety of experience adequate to the creation of fiction with the urgent relevance to the important dynamic processes of national life that the European novel, at its best, possessed. The enthusiastic reception accorded *From Here to Eternity* is due largely to the fact that it plows extensively into vast tracts of important contemporary experience that have scarcely been scratched before.

Although *From Here to Eternity* may seem like a logical, if tangential offshoot of the work of the most well-known American novelists, what it derives from them, for the most part to its detriment, are superficial modes of expression rather than its content or approach to character. What chiefly sets this lengthy and chaotic first novel apart is the fact that the author seems to have broken through to a much more intimate awareness of what, for want of a better word, must still be called the American lower classes. Particularly, Mr. Jones manages to evoke and communicate more of their significant inner life, a sense of the complex values hidden in their daily activities as these values develop organically into awareness, generalization, and even, at the peak of the novel, into a not unimpressive flight of theologic speculation. Even the least articulate, the most *lumpen* of Mr. Jones's characters functioning in the most trivial scene is fairly drenched in a kind of self-consciousness that is, I believe, a uniquely American attribute, the consequence of democracy not as it operates politically but as it penetrates

individual psychology. Democracy, psychologically, is a much queerer, more radical and dangerous experiment than is customarily realized. Where no real delegation of cultural or moral power is possible, every individual is compelled to grow his own set of values wild, so to speak. This self-fertilization process has been going on, in accelerated fashion, for some decades now with only the merest breaths of it reaching our literature. Now, quite suddenly, Mr. Jones has written a novel permeated by this special atmosphere released by a throng of individuals who seem like bundles of nervous discriminations even when they are engaged merely in scrubbing pots or collecting garbage.

The difference is most apparent in the dialogue. In most American fiction, particularly that of the more prominent writers, the dialogue is apt to be a squeezed, semi-metrical embodiment of the author's private obsessions crystallized in a manner adequate to poetic drama or fantasy but lacking in the flexible rapport with ordinary speech one expects in broad, more or less realistic, work. Reading the words supposedly spoken by a Henry James heiress, a Hemingway boxer, a Jerome Weidman dress-salesman, a Hammett detective, a Faulkner farmer, or even, to a lesser extent, a Warren politician, one's first primitive reaction is apt to be simply: "My God, people don't talk like that! At least not for more than one per cent of the time!" Some obsessive, poetic rhythm seems to have captured and fettered their tongues. The effect is hypnotic, almost unbearably inhibited and claustrophobic. After a while one accepts it with a puzzled shrug. Perhaps it's the price of narrative. You can't expect them to get everything in without destroying the unity of mood and it has a certain power, etc. Nevertheless, some obscure craving remains unappeased as if some elusive vitamins were lacking in our literary diet.

Mr. Jones is far from the superior of these authors and in many ways far from their equal but he does supply some of the missing ingredients. In *From Here to Eternity*, American speech seems to have broken out of its imprisonment, to have a freedom and mobility correlative to the environment because it is not hemmed in by the author's limited social maneuverability or overspecialized training and temperament. Put three of Mr. Jones's soldiers in an orderly room discussing a transfer or in a latrine playing poker and the language expresses a play of shifting moods and thoughts emerging out of the interactions of sharply defined personalities against a background of normalcy that you cannot quite find duplicated elsewhere. Each character seems to fall quite naturally into his native rhythm and idiom because his sensibility is allowed to unfold itself autonomously instead of being crushed

and then artificially reconstructed out of the author's prepossessions. Mr. Jones is particularly successful in allowing relatively less articulate people to express themselves fully without falsification.

Mr. Jones works best within the compass of small scenes which would, if one ignored what takes place in between, add up to a vivid and adroit panorama of Army life in pre-war Hawaii. The mortar that keeps it together, however, crumbles rather easily into long, tedious descriptions and interior monologues that often read like parodies of half a dozen American novelists from Wolfe to Faulkner. He also splits up his novel badly by trying to set in too broad a frame the epic of a single individual and the saga of the aspirations of the pre-war enlisted man. The latter task enables him to bring in much important, neglected contemporary material, the grass roots and sidewalk cultures of America, the sensibilities developed out of jazz, movies, sports, with their potent closeness to experience, amazing refinement of perception and conceptual weaknesses.

The major theme of *From Here to Eternity* is the conflict between authority and the individual as expressed in the relations between the officers and the more sentient enlisted men. The chief protagonist, Robert Prewitt, is the son of a Harlan County coal miner who, qualified for no place in American society, goes on the bum and drifts about during the Depression till he ends up in the army and discovers his vocation as a bugler. He determines to make a career of the army, to become a "thirty-year man" and has visions of a pleasant, fulfilled life. But a series of untoward events drive him toward ruin, the loss of his rating and vocation, the guardhouse and finally death, "the martyr's goal he had always known was his destiny."

Prewitt's martyrdom is not very convincing because of Mr. Jones's inability or refusal to think through precisely what Prewitt is being martyred for and what he is against. Prewitt is part of a small clan of rebels, men who have enlisted out of inability or unwillingness to adapt to middle-class mores and have a certain love for the army developed out of the joys of *esprit de corps* and pleasure in its techniques and rakehell, manly style of life. They also hate the army, chiefly because of the petty politics, incompetence, sadism, and corruption of the officers. All Mr. Jones's band of rebels fight desperately to prevent conformism and subservience from infiltrating their being, from emasculating them and destroying them as individuals.

Now, while it is not necessary for a novelist to espouse any clear-cut doctrine, the events that take place in this novel require a good deal of behind-the-scenes thinking about social problems if they are to

be presented with any force. These problems Mr. Jones, with the aid of a host of literary stratagems, simply avoids. He allows his enlisted insurgents to carry their rebellion past the point where it has a base in circumstances and, consequently, they get humiliated, persecuted, brutally beaten and killed in an almost complete vacuum of feeling. Little suspense, hope, pathos, or disappointment is generated because the situations are not defined from any point of view that would enable the reader to anticipate a favorable or unfavorable outcome. Indeed, one's sympathy finally turns away from them toward the officers who are meant to be the scapegoats of the piece. Since no radical critique of American society is offered and the rebels are shown to be more competent than the officers, why shouldn't they accept the commissions obtainable by many of them? Simply for the joy of remaining one of the boys and avoiding the stains and pains of power? Then what complaint have they left? They won't obey, they won't command, and they have no plans for changing anything. They, and the author's conception of them, are, in fine, the last splutters of a long tradition of romantic rebellion and what remains genuine in it has become heavily adulterated by deliberate muddle, hypocrisy, Hollywood heroics, and the perverseness and degeneracy of an artificially prolonged, swashbuckling adolescence.

Angus Wilson and James Jones are so antithetical in every aspect of their work that it is difficult to believe any longer in the unity of Anglo-American culture. Since both are sharply in touch with the compelling realities of their respective societies, they highlight the increasing divergence between the two countries as well as pointing up each other's vices and virtues. Mr. Jones is prodigal of space, reckless with his craft, multifarious, intellectually adventurous in an uneven fashion, and paradoxical. In no other country, I imagine, could a novelist write in such a schizophrenic fashion that he seems, at times, to have one eye fanatically searching the clouds for God and the other cocked cunningly on the best-seller lists. Mr. Wilson seems so perfectly and soberly dedicated to his craft, contriving economies of narrative art that would be the salvation of British society if they could be transposed, that he has nothing to spare for the metaphysical and ethical explorations that have been at once the stimulants and corrosives of modern fiction.

All the escape-valves of fiction, poetry, cosmic speculation, even judgment of characters as it finds a vantage point above them, seem to have been stopped up by Mr. Wilson in order to confine his stories to the human scene at its most oppressive. So effectively and with such rel-

evance has Mr. Wilson imposed a restraining discipline upon his work as to make his immediate predecessors and contemporaries seem self-indulgent by comparison. As if they were in danger of clotting together and becoming indistinguishable from one another, people are separated in these painstaking studies until they are sufficiently individualized to react upon each other in a sharp climax that at once illuminates them clearly and dramatizes them forcibly.

The title story is a fair sample of how much Wilson can effectively establish within a brief compass. Tony, an aging, ardently Catholic, Tory homosexual, is visiting a female cousin and her husband, who, despite his self-adjudged superiority, have always made him feel inferior, made him aware "of a curious, ridiculous sensation of having missed the essentials of life." The couple, besides having children, are extreme cases of thirties liberalism and humanitarianism, and have, to Tony's envy, always been looked up to by undergraduates sharing similar ideas. But times have changed. A young couple pays a visit in which it becomes obvious that they are on Tony's side and Tony, strolling out triumphantly with them, describes his relatives as extinct, dodos in fact, but "such darling dodos."

The phrase contains an irony that moves in so many directions at once as to cease to be irony, serving simply instead as a kind of sudden flare that lights up all that has gone before. The irony turns against the speaker who is himself convicted of being a dodo, if only by his use of the phrase and the petrified sophistication it reveals. The liberal couple are dodos, too, but scarcely darling ones and, in fact, the taxonomy fits nearly all Mr. Wilson's characters. Functioning in a society become fantastically parasitic on itself, they borrow and cling to some attitude or affectation with a kind of palsied egotism and grow obsolete in grotesque poses as their postures interfere with the satisfaction of urgent, elementary, human needs. Where attitudes have become infections and sympathies and antipathies themselves contagious grimaces, Mr. Wilson wisely rather than coldly refrains from inflicting his predilections, if any, on his readers. As a result, these stories have a puzzling, non-moral, masklike mode of presentation which conveys, if I read it rightly, the notion that life enforces its own harsh morality without the help of fiction writers and also a humorous, tough, last-ditch respect for almost any genuine manifestations of human need or feeling, even mean and ignoble ones. The stories in *Such Darling Dodos* seem to me easily on a par with any contemporary fiction and a kind of ultimate in freedom from even intangible cant and humbug.

William S. Poster

A PORTRAIT OF STEPHEN CRANE

STEPHEN CRANE. By John Berryman. American Men of Letters Series. William Sloane Associates. \$3.75.

"Book after book on the man [Crane]," writes Berryman, "has been announced, labored at, and laid by." As one who has at least briefly labored, this reviewer has no particular disposition to argue with the high estimate at which Berryman arrives: "By a margin he is probably the greatest American story-writer, he stands as an artist not far below Hawthorne and James, he is one of our few poets, and one of the manifest geniuses the country has produced." I suspect that there will be others who will be grateful too to this critically sensitive and industrious, though controversial, biography for giving substantial persuasiveness and weight to what seems to have been largely a sneaking opinion hitherto.

The criticism of Crane, as Berryman points out, has been oddly sporadic; the best of it is to be found in scattered *aperçus*. The bulk of it, however, seems to be divided among the cultists (including some millions of unpublished schoolboys and college boys) who seem never to get much beyond an awe at Crane's ability to write realistically of a state of war he had not experienced, and literary historians who, suffering from an occupational disability, labor at categories. The category they seem to have arrived at, though somewhat uneasily, is Naturalism. Future historians will have to contend with Berryman's book, and it seems likely their categories will be even more uneasy. About Crane's alleged naturalism Berryman is very firm: even in *Maggie*, which fits most easily, "Crane was a very imperfect Naturalist indeed and cannot possibly be seen as a disciple of Zola." As to method, the other naturalists "all *accumulate*, laborious, insistent, endless"; if we must have a term for Crane, he is an impressionist: he "selected and was gone." The hero of the *Red Badge*, in common with his other characters, is not "impersonal and typical"; he is "intensely personal and individual," though no life is strongly imaginable for him except what Crane lets you see. All this is fully and persuasively argued; perhaps still more important is the recognition throughout the book that Crane's true subject was not man in the implacable grip of circumstance, but character in the face of panic-provoking crisis. Though for Crane there is not much space left for free will between the outer compulsion of environment and fate and the inner compulsion of habit and instinct, it is crucial to understand what space there is.

On all these matters, as usually when he is relying on native in-

sight and his writer's sense of craftsmanship and intention, Berryman is generally excellent. He is at his best in the chapter on Crane's art; here he winnows the major work from the trifling, distinguishes suggestively the peculiar quality of Crane's poetry in an intriguing analogy with the primitive spell of the medicine man, defines freshly the impressionism of his prose style, not to mention three sub-varieties of it, and manages to suggest at the same time the mordantly independent character of the mind that lies behind the whole work. He does what is the business of a descriptive practical critic: he suggests the uniqueness of Crane without labeling, and he achieves discrimination without loss of clarity.

As to the distinctively biographical parts, a distinction must be made. One can only admire the intelligent industry which has gone into the establishment of fact; but concerning the scheme of personality it is possible to have grave doubts. Berryman seems to have been scrupulous in running down every source of information, both published and unpublished (including three important ones which, he tells us, he is not permitted to cite). That is not to say that the record is altogether a satisfactory one. Crane was often laconic about himself to the point of mystification; he was hopelessly careless as to facts, and spirited (as Berryman says) as to dates in what he did say; and legend multiplied mystery and contradiction about him wherever he went. Some of the puzzles about the mere events of his life will doubtless never be unraveled; insofar as an outsider can tell, Berryman seems to have gone about as far as diligence in investigation and imagination in collation can take one.

These are the materials of the portrait; the portrait that Berryman shapes from them is, I should say, much less likely to be definitive. His treatment proposes the wider question of the uses of psychoanalysis to the biographer of the dead writer, or perhaps more exactly, of the nature of the evidence which will justify such uses. I suppose it is beside the point, where truth is concerned, to confess to a certain sense of anticlimax in arriving at promised revelation in the form of an Oedipus complex, even a special and ingenious pattern of an Oedipus complex. What is more serious is the question of the criteria for proof. Much depends, in Berryman's account, on a single incident whose source is Thomas Beer (not elsewhere regarded as particularly reliable) about Crane's fright at seeing at the age of twelve a white girl stabbed by her Negro lover. But the conscientious analyst can do little with an isolated episode. Indeed even with the full co-operation of a living patient it is not always easy to reach a confident conclusion; when the

record is so laconic and contradictory as Crane's the difficulties are magnified. The attempt, of course, is to use the work as a substitute record: and with a writer so little overtly autobiographical as Crane, this requires the manipulation of symbol substitutions on a whirling scale. There is also in question the utility of the life as an illumination of the work. From the point of view of the reader who is interested simply in the impact of the story I cannot see that it is less than distracting to learn that "The Upturned Face" represents "the father's death, even the father's defiled death"; or that of the six delineated characters in "The Blue Hotel" four are masks of Crane himself. The general question is wider; but Berryman, at any rate, seems to me most illuminating—as in the exceedingly perceptive account of "The Open Boat"—when the critic and the biographer are least involved with one another.

The purpose underlying the analysis, nevertheless, is serious and admirable. Berryman is concerned to find the pattern in terms of which the life makes sense: a comprehension of the battle between Will and Necessity which will illuminate not only the life but the art. It is not a question, of course, of explaining the fact of genius itself, which is presumably inexplicable, but the direction which the genius takes. Berryman finds Crane's inner Necessity (the nature of the Liberty is less clear) in a subconscious anxiety at the implications of dark parental guilt, which in turn inspires his work's concern with panic and the effort to surmount it, and with the sense of menace or indifference in the universe and the performance of character in the face of that knowledge. Without this clue, he thinks, Crane's life is inscrutable; Beer's monograph, for instance, is "agreeably incomprehensible." Here I retain myself a different impression; while notably unpretentious and uninsistent, Beer seems to me to be building up an implicit explanation which one might describe as the proper balance of protection and exposure. According to this theory there would have been protection enough in Crane's childhood—in early beliefs, in the maternal care of a youngest child, in circumstances of gentility—to preserve an acute sensitivity to shock at the exposure to the death of the father (Crane is himself very explicit about this), at the pains of maturing (where no doubt the episode at twelve would fit in), and at personal and observed hardship and injustice. To an older psychology, at least, this would be easily as persuasive; it would appear to have the advantage of dealing with conditions more individual, and hence more determinative, than the Oedipal situation and the early sexual trauma. It seems unnecessary anyway to take so narrow a Freudian line as to ignore, as R. G. Davis put it recently in *PR*, "the way in which society helps to determine the charac-

ter and content not only of interpersonal but of intrapsychical relationships."

But I have no desire to end with niggling, or to obscure by a false emphasis the brilliant merits of criticism and discovery in the present book. And if the reader is not wholly convinced by the author's portrait, the author has anyway provided him with a rich set of materials out of which to model his own—even though Berryman does appear to feel that the author ought to take a strong line with the reader about the right interpretation.

Andrews Wanning

JAMES: A SUMMING UP

HENRY JAMES. By F. W. Dupee. American Men of Letters Series. William Sloane Associates. \$4.00

Mr. Dupee's book is a valuable one; it is the kind of book of which reviewers would once have said that "it fills a need," which is exactly what I suppose a book in The American Men of Letters Series ought to do. It does fill a need, and fills it skillfully. James was an extremely prolific writer, and he and his family were extremely prolific in

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the production of evidences about his life. Of both his work and his life it is difficult, therefore, for the general reader to get an over-all view. The materials are, in a sense, there. But Matthiessen's *James Family* runs to a discouraging seven hundred pages; and not every man can afford the New York edition of James's works: even if he can he still has by no means all of James or perhaps even all of the best; "Why," as Mr. Dupee asks, "did [James] so underrate his earlier work as to omit *Washington Square* and *The Europeans*, while giving two fat volumes to *The Tragic Muse*. . . ." And whatever motives may control the reprinting of the early unrevised texts of James's work, it is certainly not a desire to help readers understand James's history as a writer.

Moreover, the evidences for both James's work and his life are, almost uniquely, a mass of minute particulars; his famous "mastery over, his baffling escape from, Ideas" makes him a writer extremely difficult for a reader to find his way about in at first. There are few general propositions about his work to fix on, even in a preliminary way, and most of what there are (The International Theme, etc.) do very little to help a beginner. Much the same thing is true of his life. James's was a life of sensibility, of what Mr. Dupee well calls "a feeling for the limits of life"; in that kind, like his novels, it was full of tremendous events. But he was, from early childhood, almost as masterful at escaping events in the ordinary sense as at escaping Ideas. "Of hair-breadth scapes i' the imminent deadly breach" there is a really remarkable deficiency in his life. In desperation we clutch at that accident with the rural, rusty and quasi-extemporized old fire engine and make more of it, as both Matthiessen and Mr. Dupee have pointed out, than the facts will justify. In short we have needed, even more in James's case than in most, a succinct and reliable account of James's life and works, and this Mr. Dupee has given us.

He knows, himself, all the minute particulars of James's work and of his life, but he never loses either himself or us in them. What he gives us is a summary of these things. That summary has the one necessary virtue for this kind of book, a respect for the commonplace: Mr. Dupee never imposes on us conclusions he has come to by assuming some more or less arbitrary theory of society or psychology, never neglects the immediate and sensible conclusion for the tricky and sensational one, never wanders afield into the brilliant details of James's work to the neglect of the main lines of the book he is summarizing. This does not mean he is obvious and dull; it takes skill to be as sensible and inclusive as are, for example, the following observations on the vexed question of James's feelings about Minny Temple and his whole attitude toward love and marriage:

Since there is no conclusive evidence either way, it is just as logical to assume that James's invalidism, instead of preventing his courtship of Minny, was itself the symptom of some fear of, or scruple against, sexual love on his part, which then sharpened his regret. Regret for the so sadly attenuated affair he clearly did feel, and even remorse and guilt. . . . And no doubt remorse was strong in him in proportion as it reached beyond the loss of Minny herself to whatever it was in his nature that made him refuse sex in general, as he appears to have done.

The result of the continuous application of this skill and good sense to James's life and works is a book which allows us to see Henry James emerging from the odd and wonderful James family and the oddly self-conscious America of his day ("our great unendowed, unfurnished, unentertaining continent" from which Henry in his youth and William all his life thought "we ought to have leisure to turn out something handsome from the very heart of simple human nature"). "Joseph in Egypt," as Mr. Dupee amusingly remarks, "could not have had a graver sense of his representative character than James assumed in Paris." We see clearly, if barely, how the mature James with his great powerful talent, at once baroque and incredibly restricted, emerged; we see the various stages through which his work developed; and at each stage we get fine, brief summaries of some representative work—at the end, summaries of all three of the final great novels.

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There are, I believe, two things missing in this book, one perhaps the general editors' fault, one perhaps no one's. We ought to be given something—a bibliography, notes, or selected readings—to help us follow the James story further (I know this kind of thing dates, but surely it could be changed at small cost in later editions). And you do miss in Mr. Dupee's book the flavor of direct quotation, the quality of that family passion which Mr. Dupee well describes by saying the elder Henry James "simply taught that the unexamined life is not worth living." The Jameses were always full, and Henry the fullest of them all; it was perhaps impossible for Mr. Dupee to quote more than he does without expanding the book intolerably. Yet there is a complexity in the family feeling, a balance of wit and sentiment and irony, which can really be felt only in their actual words. Take them on the delicate question of the English. "In pursuit of knowledge," says Alice in her *Journal*, "I asked Nurse one day whether K. and I were different from English ladies in any way. 'Entirely different, Miss.' 'Why how are we different?' 'Not so 'aughty, Miss.' Truly discouraging.'" The faintly ironic exaggeration about something that yet seemed serious to her is very typical of the James family style; this habit of comically inflated diction, so characteristic of American humor, is one of the major devices of Henry's irony; you can feel it, for example, in the final phrase of his remark to William that "I am getting . . . to understand the English character, or at least the mind, as well as if I had invented it—which indeed, I think I could have done without any very extraordinary expenditure of ingenuity." This is only less obviously an ironic indication of his awareness, his partial acceptance, of what others felt about him than the famous story of his having remarked, after taking a walk during a visit at William's place in New Hampshire, that he had seen "a peasant gathering faggots." Truly, as William once remarked, "[Harry's] anglicisms are but 'protective resemblances,'—he's really, I won't say a Yankee, but a native of the James family, and has no other country." And just what it meant to be a native of the James family we can feel completely only in those "idiosyncrasies of diction and tricks of language," as Peirce once called them, "such as usually spring up in households of great talent."

But perhaps our loss of these things is the price Mr. Dupee must pay for getting all the necessary general truths about Henry James's long life and full career into 290 pages; and that he has done with fine modesty and good sense.

Arthur Mizener

VARIETY

LIBERALISM, LIBEL, AND
ANDRE GIDE

On the occasion of André Gide's death a shocking editorial note by Alexander Werth appeared in *The Nation* of March 10. While we do not expect obituary notices to say only what is favorable about their subjects, still it is remarkable that Mr. Werth's piece contained not one word of appreciation of Gide's creative achievement and lifelong struggle against hypocrisy, the falsification of values, and the oppression of man. In fact, the piece struck us as being more in the nature of a move in the cold war between Soviet Communism and democracy than an objective appraisal of the career of one of the more significant writers of the twentieth century. Mr. Werth attacked Gide on several grounds: he was the "dirty old man of French literature," who had served for years as the best alibi for homosexuality; his exhibitionistic and narcissistic qualities were odious to the entire younger generation, to whom he had become the embodiment of "all that was rotten, anti-social, feebly contemplative, and, in the last analysis, cowardly in the French character"; and, finally,

during the Occupation of France he had behaved "with placid cheerfulness," playing Chopin undisturbed. All this Mr. Werth communicated to the readers of *The Nation* not by way of speaking his own mind but by way of reporting, as he claimed, on the attitude of nearly all Frenchmen.

Now anyone who is at all aware of French literary opinion would at once recognize Mr. Werth's report on Gide for what it is—a political construction. As Mr. Justin O'Brien pointed out in a protesting letter to *The Nation* of March 24, what Mr. Werth had done was literally "to malign the French press by setting out to tell us what the French are saying about Gide

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without indicating that he was reporting solely on the Communist press." He had ignored the hundreds of tributes paid to Gide, among them the eloquent and moving notices by such different writers as Mauriac and Sartre, thus creating an image of Gide that supports the Stalinist attempt to vilify him and destroy his reputation.

Mr. Werth's opinion of Gide is of very little importance. After all, Mr. Werth is the foreign correspondent who not so long ago contrived to explain away the latest Soviet purge of the arts as a mere peccadillo, of no real weight in evaluating the Stalin regime. What is important, however, is that Mr. Werth's piece should have been published in the editorial pages of a magazine that still lays claim to being an organ of American liberalism. This claim has of late years become more and more hollow, and the printing of Mr. Werth's impudent slanders clinches the case against *The Nation* convincingly presented by Granville Hicks in a recent article in *Commentary*. At bottom only pro-Soviet bias can account for a magazine like *The Nation* publishing Mr. Werth's calumny of a dead writer whose entire life and work was a search for honesty.

So far as we know, this is the first time a liberal magazine has used the sexual habits of an important writer as a literary criterion. Obviously, however, Gide's "crime" was not homosexuality—

that is merely a cheap alibi—but the fact that he was among the first writers drawn to Communism who saw through its mythology and reported truthfully on life in the Soviet Union.¹ His break, which came in a period when it took considerably more courage and independence of mind than it does at present, is the “crime” for which the Stalinists and their apologists among the liberals cannot forgive him. And there is a curious twist of irony in the circumstance that at the very same time that *The Nation* found it necessary to publish Mr. Werth’s defamation of Gide it slapped a libel suit on Clement Greenberg for writing and *The New Leader* for printing a letter analyzing the political line of Mr. Del Vayo, the foreign editor of *The Nation*, during the past few years. This letter was strictly political in tone and content; it made no references to Mr. Del Vayo’s private life or possible motivation of a personal character. Yet *The Nation*, which is continually engaged in nothing if not in controversial political comment, refused to print Mr. Greenberg’s letter, choosing to frame its reply by way of legal action. Mr. Greenberg ac-

1. It is worth noting that Gide’s homosexuality, of which, as is well known, he made no secret, did not in the least bother the Communist chieftains when, in 1936, he spoke at Gorky’s funeral in Moscow and reviewed a parade in the Red Square in the company of members of the Politburo.

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cused Mr. Del Vayo of carrying through a consistently pro-Soviet policy, and *The Nation's* peculiarly unliberal rejoinder looks very much like an attempt to shut off political discussion of its policy when it touches its most sensitive spot.

But to return to Mr. Werth. Something should be said of his devious tactics in replying to the strictures of Justin O'Brien, who accused him of distorting what French writers thought of Gide. Mr. Werth had made much of a symposium in *Combat* some two years ago, in which, he said, "dozens" of young French writers expressed "almost unanimous hostility" to Gide. This is a fair sample of Mr. Werth's accuracy as a reporter: the fact is that the participants in the symposium, instead of "dozens," were only thirteen, of which the greater number, far from being unanimously hostile, were favorable to Gide. He also distorted the meaning of Mauriac's obituary notice and that of other Catholic literary men, ignoring the fact that of all French writers of the modern period it was Gide who was most assiduously courted by the Catholics and that time and again he disappointed them by resisting their efforts to convert him. Nor is Mr. Werth any more reliable in his re-

ference to Sartre's appreciation of Gide in *Les Temps Modernes*. Although admitting that Sartre's praise was "wholehearted," he cites Sartre's remark on the habitual hypocrisy of official opinion as reflected in some of the obituary articles, as if that proved Gide's unworthiness. In his original piece Mr. Werth had reported that French opinion was wholly unfavorable to Gide; yet when forced to admit that there had indeed been widespread praise of him, he tries to discredit it as hypocritical and official.

But Mr. Werth's own opinion is nothing if not official. What is the all but explicit charge of collaboration with the Germans if not the official charge made by the Communist press? There is about as much truth in it as there is in the charge that the old Bolsheviks worked for Hitler and the Mikado or that all the opponents of Soviet aggression are in the pay of Wall Street. The Stalinists and their "liberal" collaborators are such past masters in the art of political libel that their cry of injured innocence, when called to account for their own cant and duplicity, would be farcical if so much were not at stake.

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